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A CUT AND A KISS



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Ee
A CUT AND A KISS

BY

ANTHONY HOPE

THOR OF "THE PRISONER OF ZENDA," "RUPERT OF HENTZAU,"
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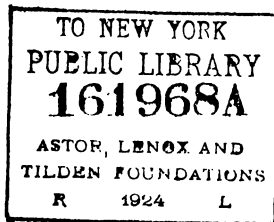
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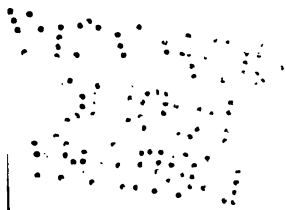
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WE were sitting round the fire at Colonel Holborow's. Dinner was over — had, in fact, been over for some time — the hour of smoke, whiskey, and confidence had arrived, and we had been telling one another the various reasons which accounted for our being unmarried, for we were all bachelors, except the Colonel, and he had, as a variety, told the reasons why he wished he was unmarried (his wife was away). Jack Dexter, however, had not spoken, and it was only in response to a direct appeal that he related the following story. The story may be true or untrue, but I must remark that Jack always had rather a weakness for representing himself on terms of condescending intimacy with the nobility and even greater folk.

Jack sighed deeply. There was a sympathetic silence. Then he began :

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"For some reason best known to herself," said Jack, with a patient shrug of his shoulders, "the Duchess of Medmenham (I don't know whether any of you fellows know her) chose to object to me as a suitor for the hand of her daughter, Mary Fitzmoine. The woman was so ignorant that she may really have thought that my birth was not equal to her daughter's; but all the world knows that the Munns were yeomen two hundred years ago, and that her Grace's family hails from a stucco villa in the neighborhood of Cardiff. However, the Duchess did object; and when the season (in the course of which I had met Lady Mary many times) ended, instead of allowing her daughter to pay a series of visits at houses where I had arranged to be, she sent her off to Switzerland, under the care of a dragon whom she had engaged to keep me and other dangerous fellows at a proper distance. On hearing of what had happened from George Fitzmoine (an intimate friend of mine), I at once threw up my visits and started in pursuit. I felt confident that Lady Mary was favorably inclined (in fact, I had certain proofs which — but no matter), and that if I won her heart I could break down the old lady's opposition. I should certainly have succeeded in my enterprise, and been

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at this moment the husband of one of the most beautiful girls in England, but for a very curious and unfortunate circumstance, which placed me in an unfavorable light in Mary's eyes. I was not to blame, it was just a bit of bad luck.

"I ranged over most of Switzerland in search of Lady Mary. Wherever I went I asked about her, and at last I got upon the track. At Inter-laken I found her name in a visitor's book, together with that of a Miss Dibbs, whom I took to be the dragon. I questioned the porter, and found that two ladies had, the afternoon before, hired a carriage and driven to a quiet little village some fifteen miles off, where there was a small but good inn. Here they evidently meant to stay, for letters were to be sent after them there for the next week. The place was described to me as pretty and retired; it seemed, therefore, an ideal spot for my purpose. I made up my mind at once. I started the next day after luncheon, took the journey easily, and came in sight of the little inn about seven o'clock in the evening. All went well. The only question was as to the disposition of Miss Dibbs towards me. I prayed that she might turn out to be a romantic dragon, but in case she should prove obstinate, I made my approaches with

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all possible caution. When my carriage stopped at the door I jumped out. The head-waiter, a big fellow in a white waistcoat, was on the steps. I drew him aside, and took a ten-franc piece from my pocket.

“‘Is there a young lady staying here?’ I asked. ‘Tall, fair, handsome?’ and I slid the piece of gold into his palm.

“‘Well, yes, sir,’ he said, ‘there is a young lady, and she’s all that you say, sir. Pardon me, Monsieur is English?’

“‘Yes,’ said I.

“‘Ah!’ said he, smiling mysteriously. ‘And it is Wednesday.’

“‘It is certainly Wednesday,’ I admitted, though I did not see that the day of the week mattered much.

“He came close to me and whispered: ‘The lady thought you might come, sir. I think she expects you, sir. Oh, you can rely on my discretion, sir.’

“I was rather surprised, but not very much, for I had hinted to George Fitzmoine that I meant to try my luck, and I supposed that he had passed my hint on to his sister. My predominant feeling was one of gratification. Mary loved me! Mary

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expected me ! There was complete mental sympathy between Mary and myself !

“ I went up to my room in a state of great contentment. I had been there about half an hour, when my friend the waiter came in. Advancing towards me with a mysterious air, he took a blank envelope out of his pocket and held it up before me with a roguish smile.

“ ‘ Monsieur will know the handwriting inside,’ he said cunningly.

“ Now I had never corresponded with Lady Mary, and of course did not know her handwriting, but I saw no use in telling the waiter that. In truth, I thought the fellow quite familiar enough. So I said shortly and with some hauteur :

“ ‘ Give me the note ;’ and I took another piece of gold out of my pocket. We exchanged our possessions, the waiter withdrew with a wink, and I tore open the precious note.

“ ‘ Whatever you do,’ it ran, ‘ don’t recognize me. I am *watched*. As soon as I can I will tell you where to meet me. I knew you would come. — M.’

“ ‘ The darling !’ I exclaimed. ‘ She ’s a girl of spirit. I ’ll take good care not to betray her. Oh, we ’ll circumvent old Dibbs between us.’

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“At eight o’clock I went down to the *salle à manger*. It was quite empty. Mary and Miss Dibbs no doubt dined in their own sitting-room, and there appeared to be no one else in the hotel. However, when I was half way through my meal, a stylishly dressed young woman came in and sat down at a table at the end of the room farthest from where I was. I should have noticed her more, but I was in a reverie about Mary’s admirable charms, and I only just looked at her; she was frowning and drumming angrily with her fingers on the table. The head waiter hurried up to her; his face was covered with smiles, and he gave me a confidential nod *en passant*. Nothing else occurred, except that a villanous-looking fellow — something, to judge by his appearance, between a valet and a secretary — thrust his ugly head through the door three or four times. Whenever he did so the waiter smiled blandly at him. He did it the last time just as the lady was walking down the room. Seeing her coming he drew back and held the door open for her with a clumsy, apologetic bow. She smiled scornfully and passed through. The waiter stood grinning in the middle of the room, and when I, in my turn, rose, he whispered to me, ‘It’s

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all right, sir.' I went to bed and dreamt of Mary.

"On entering the room next morning the first person I saw was Mary. She was looking adorably fresh and pretty. She sat opposite a stout, severe-looking dame in black. Directly my eyes alighted on her I schooled them into a studiously vacant expression. She, poor girl, was no diplomatist. She started; she glanced anxiously at Miss Dibbs; I saw her lips move; she blushed; she seemed almost to smile. Of course this behavior (I loved Mary the more that she could not conceal her delightful embarrassment!) excited the dragon's curiosity; she turned round and favored me with a searching gaze. I was equal to the occasion. I comprehended them both in a long, cool, deliberate, empty stare. The strain on my self-control was immense, but I supported it. Mary blushed crimson, and her eyes sank to her plate. Poor girl! She had sadly overrated her powers of deception. I was not surprised that Miss Dibbs frowned severely and sniffed audibly.

"At that moment the other girl came in. She walked up, took the table next to mine, and, to my confusion, bestowed upon me a look of evident interest though of the utmost shortness — one of

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those looks, you know, that seem to be repented of in an instant, and are generally the most deliberate. I took no notice at all, assuming an air of entire unconsciousness. A few minutes later Mary got up and made for the door, with Miss Dibbs in close attendance. The imprudent child could not forbear to glance at me; but I, seeing the dragon's watchful eye upon me, remained absolutely irresponsive. Nay, to throw Miss Dibbs off the scent, I fixed my eye on my neighbor with assumed preoccupation. Flushing painfully, Mary hurried out, and I heard Miss Dibbs sniff again. I chuckled over her obvious disapproval of my neighbor and myself. The excellent woman evidently thought us no better than we ought to be! But I felt that I should go mad if I could not speak to Mary soon.

"I went out and sat down in the verandah. It was then about half-past ten. The ugly fellow whom I had noticed the evening before was hanging about, but presently a waiter came and spoke to him, and he got up with a grumble and went into the house. Ten minutes afterwards my neighbor of the *salle à manger* came out. She looked very discontented. She rang a handbell that stood on the table, and a waiter ran up.

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“‘Where’s the head-waiter?’ she asked sharply.

“‘Pardon, ma’m selle, but he is waiting on some ladies upstairs.’

“‘What a nuisance!’ said she. ‘But you’ll do. I want to give him an order. Stay, come indoors and I’ll write it down.’

“She disappeared, and I sat on, wondering how I was to get a sight of Mary. At last, in weariness, I went indoors to the smoking-room. It looked out to the back and was a dreary little room; but I lit my cigar and began on a three days’ old copy of the *Times*. Thus I spent a tedious hour. Then my friend the head-waiter appeared, looking more roguish than ever. I dived into my pocket, he produced a note, I seized it.

“‘Why have you been so long?’ (Charmingly unreasonable! what could I have done?) ‘Directly you get this, come to the wood behind the hotel. Take the path to the right and go straight till you find me. I have thrown the *spy*’ (Poor old Dibbs!) ‘off the scent. — M.’

“I caught up my hat and rushed into the hall. I cannoned into a young man who had just got out of a carriage and was standing in the verandah. With a hasty apology I dashed on. Beyond doubt

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she loved me! And she was honest enough not to conceal it. I hate mock modesty. I longed to show her how truly I returned her love, and I rejoiced that there need be no tedious preliminaries. Mary and I understood one another. A kiss would be the seal of our love — and the most suitable beginning of our conversation.

“In five minutes I was in the wood. Just before I disappeared among its trees, I heard some one calling ‘*Monsieur, monsieur!*’ It sounded like the voice of the head-waiter, but I would n’t have stopped for fifty head-waiters. I took the path Mary had indicated and ran along it at the top of my speed. Suddenly, to my joy, I caught sight of the figure of a girl; she was seated on a mound of grass, and though her face was from me, I made no doubt it was Mary. She wore the most charming blue cloak (it was a chilly morning) which completely enveloped her. I determined not to shilly-shally. She loved me — I loved her. I ran forward, plumped down on my knees behind her, took her head between my hands, dodged round, and kissed her cheek.

“‘At last, my darling!’ I cried in passionate tones.

“By Jupiter, it was the other girl, though!

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"I sprang back in horror. The girl looked at me for a moment. Then she blushed; then she frowned; then — why, then she began to laugh consumedly. I was amazed.

"“At last,” you call it,’ she gasped. ‘I call it “at first”;’ and she laughed merrily and melodiously. She certainly had a nice laugh, that girl.

"Now, concerning what follows I have, since then, entertained some doubts whether I behaved in all respects discreetly. You will allow that the position was a difficult one, but it is, I admit, very possible that my wisest course would have been to make an apology and turn tail as quickly as I could. Well, I did n't. I thought that I owed the lady a full explanation. Besides, I wanted a full explanation myself. Finally (oh yes, I see you fellows grinning and winking), Mary was not there, and this young lady rather interested me. I decided that I would have five minutes' talk with her; then I would run back and find Mary.

"‘I must beg a thousand pardons,’ I began, ‘but I took you for somebody else.’

"‘Oh, of course,’ said she with a shrug; ‘it’s always that.’

"‘You appear incredulous,’ said I rather offended.

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“ ‘ Well, and if I am ? ’ said she.

“ ‘ My feelings were hurt. I produced Mary’s second note.

“ ‘ If I can trust to your discretion I’ll prove what I say,’ I remarked in a nettled tone.

“ ‘ I shall be very curious to hear the proof, sir, and I will be most discreet,’ she said. She was pouting, but her eyes danced. Really she looked very pretty — although, of course, I would not for a moment compare her with Lady Mary.

“ ‘ A lady,’ said I, ‘ was so kind as to tell me to seek her here this morning.’

“ ‘ Oh, as if I believed that ! ’

“ ‘ I was piqued.

“ ‘ There ’s the proof,’ I cried, flinging the note into her lap.

“ ‘ She took it up, glanced at it, and gave a little shriek.

“ ‘ Where did you get this ? ’

“ ‘ Why, from the head-waiter.’

“ ‘ Oh, the fool ! ’ she cried. ‘ It ’s mine.’

“ ‘ Yours ? nonsense ! He gave me that and another last night.’

“ ‘ Oh, the stupidity ! They were for — they were not for you. They were for — some one who is to arrive.’

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“ I pointed at the signature, and gasped, ‘ M !
Do you sign “ M ” ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, my name ’s — my name begins with M.
Oh, if I ’d only seen that waiter this morning !
Oh, the idiot ! ’ ”

“ Then I believe I swore.

“ ‘ Madame,’ said I, ‘ I ’m ruined ! No harm is
done to you — I ’m a man of honor — but I ’m
ruined. On the strength of your wretched notes,
madame, I ’ve cut the girl I love best in the world
— cut her dead — dead — dead ! ’ ”

“ ‘ What ? That young lady in the — Oh, you
thought they were from her ? Oh, I see ! How
— how — oh, how very amusing ! ’ And the
heartless little wretch went off into another peal
of laughter.

“ ‘ You pretended not to know her ! Oh,
dear ! oh, dear ! ’ and her laughter echoed
among the trees again. ‘ I saw her looking at
you, and you ate on like a pig ! Oh, dear ! oh,
dear ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Stop laughing ! ’ said I savagely.

“ ‘ Oh, I ’m very sorry, but I can’t. What a
scrape you ’ve got into. Oh, dear me ! ’ And
she wiped her eyes (they were as blue as her
cloak) with a delicate bit of a handkerchief.

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“‘You shan’t laugh,’ said I. ‘Who were your notes for?’

“‘Somebody I expected. He has n’t come. The waiter took you for him, I suppose. I never thought of his being so stupid. Oh, what a brute she must have thought you!’ And she began to laugh again.

“‘I had had enough of it. I hate being laughed at.

“‘If you go on laughing,’ said I, ‘I’ll kiss you again.’

“‘The threat was a failure; she did not appear at all alarmed.

“‘Not you,’ she said, laughing worse than ever.

“‘I should like you fellows to understand that my heart never wavered in its allegiance to Lady Mary — my conscience is quite clear as to that — but I had pledged my word. I caught that tiresome girl round the waist and I kissed her once — I’m sure of once, anyhow. She gasped and struggled, laughing still. Then, with a sudden change of voice, she cried, ‘Stop, stop!’

“‘I let her go. I looked round. We had a gallery of spectators. On one side stood the ugly-headed valet; on the other, in attitudes of horror, Mary and Miss Dibbs!

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“ ‘You’ve ruined us both now,’ said the girl in blue.

“ I rose to my feet and was about to explain, when the ugly fellow rushed at me, brandishing a cane. I had quite enough to arrange without being bothered by him. I caught the cane in my left hand, and with my right I knocked him down.

“ Then I walked up to Lady Mary. I took no heed of Miss Dibbs’s presence ; it was too critical a moment to think of trifles.

“ ‘Lady Mary,’ said I, ‘appearances are so much against me that you cannot possibly attach the slightest weight to them.’

“ ‘Sir,’ said she, ‘I have no longer the honor of your acquaintance. I have only to thank you for having had the consideration not to recognize me when we met so unexpectedly in the dining-room. Pray continue to show me the same favor.’

“ With which pleasant little speech she turned on her heel. It was clear that she suspected me most unjustly. I turned to the girl in blue, but she was beforehand with me.

“ ‘Ah, I wish I’d never seen you,’ she cried, ‘you great stupid creature! He (she pointed to

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the prostrate figure of the ugly servant) will tell Frederic everything.'

" 'Come,' said I, '*I* was only an accident; it would have been just as bad if —'

"As I spoke I heard a step behind me. Turning round, I found myself face to face with the young man with whom I had come in collision as I rushed through the hall. He gazed at the servant — at me — at the girl in blue.

" 'Margaret!' he exclaimed. 'What is the —?'

" 'Hush, hush!' she whispered, pointing again to the servant.

"I stepped up to him, lifting my hat:

" 'Sir,' said I, 'kindly inform me if you are the gentleman who was to come from England.'

" 'Certainly I come from England,' he said.

" 'And you ought to have arrived on Wednesday?'

" 'Yes,' he answered.

" 'Then,' said I, 'all I have to say to you, sir, is — that I wish the devil you'd keep your appointments.' And I left them.

" 'That's why I'm not married, boys. Where's my glass?'

" 'It is a very curious story,' observed the Col-

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onel. "And who were they all — the girl in blue — and the young man — and the ugly servant — and Frederic?"

"Colonel," said Jack, with an air of deepest mystery, "You would be astounded to hear."

We all pricked up our ears.

"But," he continued, "I am not at liberty to say."

We sank back in our chairs.

"Do you know?" asked the Colonel, and Jack nodded solemnly.

"Out with it!" we cried.

"Impossible!" said Jack. "But I may tell you that the matter engaged the attention of more than one of the Foreign Offices of Europe."

"Good heavens!" cried we in chorus, and Jack drank off his whiskey and water, rose to his feet, and put on his hat.

"Poor, dear Mary!" said he, as he opened the door. "She never got over it."

The Colonel shouted after him, "Then what did she marry Jenkyns of the Blues for?"

"Pique," said Jack, and he shut the door.

A Stage on the Road



I

NEITHER life nor the lawn-tennis club was so full at Natterley that the news of Harry Sterling's return had not some importance. He came back, moreover, to assume a position very different from his old one. He had left Harrow now, departing in the sweet aroma of a long score against Eaton at Lord's, and was to go up to Oxford in October. Now between a school-boy and a University man there is a gulf, indicated unmistakably by the cigarette which adorned Harry's mouth as he walked down the street with a newly-acquiescent father, and thoroughly realized by his old playmates. The young men greeted him as an equal, the boys grudgingly accepted his superiority, and the girls received him much as though they had never met him before in their lives and were pressingly in need of an introduction. These

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features of his re-appearance amused Mrs. Mortimer; she recollected him as an untidy, shy, pretty boy, but mind, working on matter, had so transformed him, that she was doubtful enough about him to ask her husband if that were really Harry Sterling. Mr. Mortimer, mopping his bald head after one of his energetic failures at lawn-tennis, grunted assent, and remarked that a few years more would see a like development in their elder son, a remark which bordered on absurdity, for Johnny was but eight, and ten years are not a few years to a lady of twenty-eight, whatever they may seem to a man of forty-four.

Presently Harry, shaking himself free from an entangling group of the Vicarage girls, joined his father, and the two came across to Mrs. Mortimer. She was a favorite of old Sterling's, and he was proud to present his handsome son to her. She listened graciously to his jocosities, stealing a glance at Harry when his father called him "a good boy." Harry blushed, and assumed an air of indifference, tossing his hat back from his smooth forehead, and swinging his racquet carelessly in his hand. The lady addressed some words of patronizing kindness to him, seeking to put him at his ease. She seemed to succeed to

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some extent, for he let his father and her husband go off together, and sat down by her on the bench, regardless of the fact that the Vicarage girls were waiting for him to make a fourth. He said nothing, and Mrs. Mortimer looked at him from under her long lashes; in so doing she discovered that he was looking at her.

"Aren't you going to play any more, Mr. Sterling?" she asked.

"Why are n't you playing?" he rejoined.

"My husband says I play too badly."

"Oh, play with me; we shall make a good pair."

"Then you must be very good."

"Well, no one can play a hang here, you know. Besides I'm sure you're all right, really."

"You forget my weight of years."

He opened his blue eyes a little, and laughed. He was, in fact, astonished to find that she was quite a young woman. Remembering old Mortimer and the babies, he had thought of her as full middle-aged. But she was not; nor had she that likeness to a suet-pudding which his new-born critical faculty cruelly detected in his old friends, the Vicarage girls. There was one of them — Maudie — with whom he had flirted in his hol-

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idays; he wondered at that, especially when a relentless memory told him that Mrs. Mortimer must have been at the parties where the thing went on. He felt very much older, so much older that Mrs. Mortimer became at once a contemporary; why then should she begin, as she now did, to talk to him, in quasi-maternal fashion, about his prospects? Men don't have prospects, or, anyhow, are spared questionings thereon. Either from impatience of this topic, or because, after all, tennis was not to be neglected, he left her, and she sat alone for a little while, watching him play. She was glad that she had not played; she could not have rivalled the activity of the Vicarage girls. She got up and joined Mrs. Sterling, who was presiding over the club tea-pot. The good lady expected compliments on her son, but for some reason Mrs. Mortimer gave her none. Very soon, indeed, she took Johnny away with her, leaving her husband to follow at his leisure.

In comparing Maudie Sinclair to a suet-pudding, Harry had looked at the dark side of the matter. The suggestion, though indisputable, was only occasionally obtrusive, and as a rule hushed almost to silence by the pleasant goodnature which redeemed shapeless features. Mrs. Mortimer had

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always liked Maudie, who ran in and out of her house continually, and had made of herself a vice-mother to the little children. The very next day she came, and, in the intervals of playing cricket with Johnny, took occasion to inform Mrs. Mortimer that in her opinion Harry Sterling was by no means improved by his new status and dignity. She went so far as to use the term "stuck-up." "He did n't use to be like that," she said, shaking her head, "he used to be very jolly." Mrs. Mortimer was relieved to note an entire absence of romance either in the regretted past or the condemned present: Maudie mourned a friend spoilt, not an admirer lost: the tone of her criticisms left no doubt of it, and Mrs. Mortimer, with a laugh, announced her intention of asking the Sterlings to dinner and having Maudie to meet them. "You will be able to make it up then," said she.

"Why, I see him every day at the tennis club," cried Maudie in surprise. The faintest of blushes tinged Mrs. Mortimer's cheek as she chid herself for forgetting this obvious fact.

The situation now developed rapidly. The absurd thing happened: Harry Sterling began to take a serious view of his attachment to Mrs. Mortimer. The one thing more absurd, that she

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should take a serious view of it, had not happened yet, and, indeed, would never happen, so she told herself with a nervous little laugh. Harry gave her no opportunity of saying so to him, for you cannot reprove glances or discourage pressings of your hand in fashion so blunt. And he was very discreet : he never made her look foolish ; in public he treated her with just the degree of attention that gained his mother's fond eulogium and his father's approving smile ; while Mr. Mortimer, who went to London at nine o'clock every morning and did not return till seven, was very seldom bothered by finding the young fellow hanging about the house. Certainly he came pretty frequently between the hours named, but it was, as the children could have witnessed, to play with them. And, through his comings and goings, Mrs. Mortimer moved with pleasure, vexation, self-contempt, and eagerness.

One night she and her husband went to dine with the Sterlings. After dinner, Mr. Mortimer accepted his host's invitation to stay for a smoke. He saw no difficulty in his wife walking home alone : it was but half-a-mile, and the night was fine and moonlit. Mrs. Mortimer made no difficulty either, but Mrs. Sterling was sure that Harry

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would be delighted to see Mrs. Mortimer to her house. She liked the boy to learn habits of politeness, she said, and his father eagerly proffered his escort, waving aside Mrs. Mortimer's protest that she would not think of troubling Mr. Harry; throughout which conversation Harry said nothing at all, but stood smiling, with his hat in his hand, the picture of an obedient, well-mannered youth. There are generally two ways anywhere, and there were two from the Sterlings' to the Mortimers', the short one through the village, and the long one round by the lane and across the Church meadow. The path diverging to the latter route comes very soon after you leave the Sterlings, and not a word had passed when Mrs. Mortimer and Harry reached it. Still without a word Harry turned off to follow the path. Mrs. Mortimer glanced at him; Harry smiled.

"It's much longer," she said.

"There's lots of time," rejoined Harry, "and it's such a jolly night." The better to enjoy the night's beauty, he slackened his pace to a very crawl.

"It's very dark, won't you take my arm?" he said.

"What nonsense! Why, I could see to read!"

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"But I'm sure you're tired."

"How absurd you are! Was it a great bore?"

"What?"

"Why, coming."

"No," said Harry.

In such affairs monosyllables are danger signals. A long protestation might have meant nothing: in this short, sufficient negative Mrs. Mortimer recognized the boy's sincerity. A little thrill of pride and shame, and perhaps something else, ran through her. The night was hot, and she unfastened the clasp of her cloak, breathing a trifle quickly. To relieve the silence, she said, with a laugh:

"You see we poor married women have to depend on charity. Our husbands don't care to walk home with us. Your father was bent on your coming."

Harry laughed a short laugh: the utter darkness of Mr. Sterling's condition struck through his agitation down to his sense of humor. Mrs. Mortimer smiled at him, she could not help it: the secret between them was so pleasant to her, even while she hated herself for its existence.

They had reached the meadow now, half-way through their journey. A little gate led into it,

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and Harry stopped, leaning his arm on the top rail.

"Oh, no, we must go on," she murmured.

"They won't move for an hour yet," he answered, and then he suddenly broke out:

"How — how funny it is! I hardly remembered you, you know."

"Oh, but I remembered you, a pretty little boy," and she looked up at his face, half-a-foot above her. Mere stature has much effect, and the little boy stage seemed very far away. And he knew that it did, for he put out his hand to take hers. She drew back.

"No," she said.

Harry blushed. She took hold of the gate and he, yielding his place, let her pass through. For a minute or two they walked on in silence.

"Oh, how silly you are!" she cried then, beginning with a laugh and ending with a strange catch in her throat. "Why, you're only just out of knicker-bockers!"

"I don't care, I don't care, Hilda —"

"Hush! hush! Oh, indeed, you must be quiet! See, we are nearly home."

He seized her hand, not to be quelled this time, and, bending low over it, kissed it. She did not

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draw it away, but watched him with a curious, pained smile. He looked up in her face, his own glowing with excitement. He righted himself to his full stature and, from that stooping, kissed her on the lips.

"Oh, you silly boy," she moaned, and found herself alone in the meadow. He had gone swiftly back by the way they had come, and she went on to her home.

"Well, the boy saw you home?" asked Mr. Mortimer when he arrived half-an-hour later.

"Yes," she said, raising her head from the cushions of the sofa on which he found her lying.

"I supposed so, but he did n't come into the smoking-room when he got back. Went straight to bed, I expect. He's a nice-mannered young fellow, is n't he?"

"Oh, very," said Mrs. Mortimer.

II

Mr. Mortimer had never been so looked after, cosseted, and comforted for his early start as the next morning, nor the children found their mother so patient and affectionate. She was in an abasement of shame and disgust at herself

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and quite unable to treat her transgression lightly. That he was a boy and she — not a girl — seemed to charge her with his as well as her own sins, and, besides this moral aggravation, entailed a lower anxiety as to his discretion and secrecy that drove her half-mad with worry. Suppose he should boast of it! Or, if he were not bad enough for that, only suppose he should be carried away into carelessness about it! He had nothing to fear worse than what he would call “a wiggling,” and perhaps summary dismissal to a tutor’s: she had more at risk than she could bear to think of. Probably, by now, he recognized his foolishness, and laughed at himself and her. This thought made her no happier, for men may do all that — and yet, very often, they do not stop.

She had to go to a party at the Vicarage in the afternoon. Harry would be sure to be there, and, with a conflict of feeling finding expression in her acts, she protected herself by taking the children, while she inconsistently dressed herself in her most youthful and coquettish costume. She found herself almost grudging Johnny his rapidly increasing inches, even while she relied on him for an assertion of her position as a matron. For the folly of last night was to be over and done with, and her

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acquaintance with Harry Sterling to return to its only possible sane basis: that she was resolved on, but she wanted Harry honestly — even keenly — to regret her determination.

He was talking to Maudie Sinclair when she arrived: he took off his hat, but did not allow his eyes to meet hers. She gathered her children round her, and sat down among the chaperons. Mrs. Sterling came and talked to her; divining a sympathy, the good mother had much to say of her son, of her hopes and fears for him: so many dangers beset young men, especially if they were attractive, like Harry: there were debts, idleness, fast men, and — worst of all — there were designing women, ready to impose on and ruin the innocence of youth.

“He’s been such a good boy till now,” said Mrs. Sterling, “but of course his father and I feel anxious. If we could only keep him here, out of harm’s way, under our own eyes!”

Mrs. Mortimer murmured consolation.

“How kind of you! And your influence is so good for him. He thinks such a lot of you, Hilda.”

Mrs. Mortimer, tried too hard, rose and strolled away. Harry’s set seemed to end almost directly, and a moment later he was shaking hands with

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her, still keeping his eyes away from hers. She made her grasp cold and inanimate, and he divined the displeasure she meant to indicate.

"You must go and play again," she said, "or talk to the girls. You must n't come and talk to me."

"Why not? How can I help it — now?"

The laughing at her and himself had evidently not come, but, bad as that would have been to bear, his tone threatened something worse.

"Don't," she answered sharply, "I'm very angry. You were very unkind and — and ungentlemanly last night."

He flushed crimson.

"Did n't you like it?" he asked, with the terrible simplicity of his youth.

For all her trouble, she had to bite her lip to hide a smile. What a question to ask — just in so many words!

"It was very, very wicked, and of course I did n't like it," she answered. "Oh, Harry, don't you know how wicked it was?"

"Oh, yes, I know that, of course," he said, picking at the straw of his hat, which he was carrying in his hand.

"Well, then!" she said.

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"I could n't help it."

"You must help it. Oh, don't you know — oh, it's absurd! I'm years older than you."

"You looked so — so awfully pretty."

"I can't stand talking to you. They'll all see."

"Oh, it's all right. You're a friend of mother's, you know. I say, when shall I be able to see you again — alone, you know?"

Mrs. Mortimer was within an ace of a burst of tears. He seemed not to know that he made her faint with shame and mad with exultation and bewildered with terror all in a moment. His new manhood took no heed, save of itself. Was this being out of harm's way, under the eyes of those poor parents?

"If — if you care the least for me — for what I wish, go away, Harry," she whispered.

He looked at her in wonder, but, with a frown on his face, did as he was told. Five minutes later he was playing again; she heard him shout "Thirty-love" as he served, a note of triumphant battle in his voice. She believed that she was altogether out of his thoughts.

Her husband was to dine in town that night, and, for sheer protection, she made Maudie Sinclair come out and share her evening meal. The

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children were put to bed and they sat down alone together, talking over the party. Maudie was pleased to relax a little of her severity towards Harry Sterling: she admitted that he had been very useful in arranging the sets, and very pleasant to every one.

"Of course he's conceited," she said, "but all boys are. He'll get over it."

"You talk as if you were a hundred, Maudie," laughed Mrs. Mortimer. "He's older than you are."

"Oh, but boys are much younger than girls, Mrs. Mortimer. Harry Sterling's quite a boy still."

A knock sounded at the door. A minute later the boy walked in. The sight of Maudie Sinclair produced a momentary start, but he recovered himself and delivered a note from his mother, the excuse for his visit. It was an invitation for a few days ahead; there could certainly have been no hurry for it to arrive that night. While Mrs. Mortimer read it, Harry sat down and looked at her. She was obliged to treat his arrival as unimportant, and invited him to have a glass of wine.

"Why are you in evening dress?" asked Maudie, wonderingly.

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"For dinner," answered Harry.

"Do you dress when you're alone at home?"

"Generally. Most men do."

Maudie allowed herself to laugh. Mrs. Mortimer saw the joke too, but its amusement was bitter to her.

"I like it," she said gently. "Most of the men I know do it."

"Your husband doesn't," observed Miss Sinclair.

"Poor George gets down from town so tired."

She gave Harry the reply she had written (it was a refusal — she could not have told why), but he seemed not to understand that he was to go. Before he apprehended, she had to give him a significant glance: she gave it in dread of Maudie's eyes. She knew how sharp schoolgirls' eyes are in such things. Whether Maudie saw it or not, Harry did; he sprang to his feet and said good night.

Maudie was not long after him. The conversation languished and there was nothing to keep her. With an honest yawn she took her leave: Mrs. Mortimer accompanied her down the garden to the gate. As she went, she became to her startled horror aware of a third person in the garden. She got rid of Maudie as soon as she could, and turned

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back to the house. Harry, emerging from behind a tree, stood before her.

"I know what you're going to say," he said doggedly, "but I could n't help it. I was dying to see you again." She spread out her hands as though to push him away. She was like a frightened girl.

"Oh, you're mad," she whispered. "You must go. Suppose any one should come. Suppose my husband——"

"I can't help it. I won't stay long."

"Harry, Harry, don't be cruel. You'll ruin me, Harry. If you love me, go, if you love me."

Even now he hardly fathomed her distress, but she had made him understand that this spot and this time were too dangerous.

"Tell me where I can see you safely," he asked, almost demanded.

"You can see me safely — nowhere."

"Nowhere? You mean that you won't ——?"

"Harry, come here a minute — there — no closer. I just want to be able to touch your hair. Go away, dear — yes, I said 'dear.' Do, please, go away. You — you won't be any happier afterwards for having — if — if you don't go away."

He stood irresolutely still. Her fingers lightly

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touched his hair, and then her arm dropped at her side. He saw a tear run down her cheek. Suddenly his own face turned crimson.

"I'm — I'm very sorry," he muttered. "I didn't mean ——"

"Good night. I'm going in."

She held out her hand. Again he bent and kissed it, and, as he did so, he felt the light touch of her lips among his hair.

"I'm such a foolish, foolish woman," she whispered, "but you're a gentleman, Harry," and she drew her hand away and left him.

Two days later she took her children off to the sea-side. And the Mortimers never came back to Natterly. She wrote and told Mrs. Sterling that George wanted to be nearer his work in town and that they had gone to live at Wimbledon. "How we shall miss her!" exclaimed good Mrs. Sterling. "Poor Harry! What'll he say?"

One day, at Brighton, some six years later, a lady in widow's weeds, accompanied by a long loose-limbed boy of fourteen, was taking the air by the sea. The place was full of people, and the scene gay. Mrs. Mortimer sat down on a seat and Johnny stood idly by her. Presently a young man and a girl came along. While they were still

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a long way off, Mrs. Mortimer, who was looking in that direction, suddenly leant forward, started a little, and looked hard at them. Johnny, noticing nothing, whistled unconcernedly. The couple drew near. Mrs. Mortimer sat with a faint smile on her face. The girl was chatting merrily to the young man, and he listened to her and laughed every now and then, but his bright eyes were not fixed to her, but were here, there, and everywhere, where metal attractive to such eyes might be found. The discursive mood of the eyes somehow pleased Mrs. Mortimer. Just as the young man came opposite to her, he glanced in her direction. Mrs. Mortimer wore the curious, half-indifferent, half-expectant air of one ready for recognition but not claiming it as a right. At the first glance, a puzzled look came into the young man's eyes. He looked again. Then there was a blank in his eyes. Mrs. Mortimer made no sign, but sat still, half-expectant. He was past her now, but he flung a last glance over his shoulder. He was evidently very doubtful whether the lady on the seat, in the heavy mourning robes, were some one he knew or not. First he thought she was, and then he thought she was n't. The face certainly reminded him of — Now who the deuce was it? Harry knit his brows and exclaimed :

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“I half believe that ’s somebody I know !”

And he puzzled over it for nearly five minutes, all in vain. Meanwhile Mrs. Mortimer looked at the sea, till Johnny told her that it was dinner-time.

A Man and His Model



WE had been discussing fame and its rewards. We assumed that we, each and all of us, had attained eminence, and we speculated on the honor that we should elect to receive from a gracious sovereign and a grateful country. Some chose the Garter, others an earldom, others a pecuniary grant; but Colonel Holborow would have none of these. He pooh-poohed them, and bringing his fist down on the table he declared:

"There is only one indisputable and supreme mark of greatness."

"And that is what?" asked one of us.

"Why, to be in the waxworks," said he.

"True, true!" we cried; but I added sadly, "But it's almost impossible to achieve, unless you commit a murder."

"I don't know about that," said Jack Dexter, who had up to that moment taken no part in the conversation. "I'm in a waxwork show my-

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self — not in London, you know, but — well, have any of you fellows visited Petersburg ? ”

We all admitted that we had not.

“ Ah, then you have n’t seen my image,” said Jack, regretfully. “ It’s in Madame Marribon’s famous exhibition there.”

“ But, my dear Jack,” said the colonel, “ how in the world did it come about ? ”

“ It’s rather a curious story,” said Jack. “ I’ll tell it you, if you’ll all promise that it shall go no further. You won’t mind if I don’t mention names ? ”

We promised discretion, and said that we should be quite satisfied with A. B. C. or X. Y. Z., or such other symbols as Jack chose to adopt.

“ Well,” he began, after a pull at his whiskey and water, “ when I was a few years younger, and a good deal more foolish than I am now — it was before that affair with Lady Mary Fitzmoine that I told you of the other day — I spent the winter at Petersburg, and there I made the acquaintance of one of the most beautiful women who, I suppose, ever lived.”

Jack paused, to allow the sensation to take full effect. But we showed no surprise, and with a slight frown he continued :

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"I'll call her the Princess X.—Princess Nadia X. She was married to a grumpy wretch, who held a high position in the police, and treated her, upon my word, little better than if she had been a Nihilist. I pitied her. I must admit—I am among gentlemen—that I also admired her, and that a warm, although perfectly honorable, attachment sprang up between us. Her husband was, however, savagely and unreasonably jealous, and what with him, his spies, and his mother (the worst spy of all), it was with the utmost difficulty that I succeeded in seeing anything of the Princess. I dared not call at her house more than once a month, and I was driven—positively driven—to a thing for which I entertain the greatest dislike. I was, I say, compelled to make arrangements which insured my being present at various places of public resort—picture-galleries and the like—at the times which the Princess selected for visiting them. By these means we were enabled to enjoy many most charming conversations, and it was my privilege to support and sustain the Princess in the very trying circumstances in which her lot was cast. I did this, I need not say, at very considerable risk. I was not blind to the danger I ran. Her husband wielded large and secret powers—

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save that I was an English subject, I was entirely powerless against him ; and it would have been a long time before the voice of a prisoner in the fortress of Peter and Paul reached the ears of the Foreign Office. However, I took the risk. Nadia needed me, and that was enough.

“ But of all our *rendez-vous*, there was none which we found more convenient and suitable than Madame Marribon’s waxwork exhibition. It was a long way from the Princess’s residence, in an unfashionable quarter of the town, and was frequented mainly by persons who did not move in society, and were quite unfamiliar with faces as well known in the great world as those of the Princess and myself. Our only danger arose from the maid-servants of our acquaintances and from the police ; but by avoiding the gallery in which the figures of murderers and other criminals were exhibited we reduced this peril to a minimum — for, of course, the servants were attracted by the criminals, and the police were attracted by the servants. Our favorite nook was beside a group of *savants* of European reputation, and immediately behind the Prime Ministers of Europe. This spot we usually had quite to ourselves.

“ Well, one day we were sitting there, poor

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Nadia had for a moment forgotten her troubles, and was talking with the rare wit and brilliancy which marked her conversation when she was in good spirits. I was keeping up the ball of talk as well as I could, and was gazing, not, I hope, too passionately, at her incomparable complexion and magnificent dark eyes—like deep water seen by moonlight, they were. Dear, dear!”

Jack paused for a moment, and took a sip from his glass. We sipped sympathetically, and he regained his composure.

“Suddenly, just as I was telling the Princess a most interesting occurrence which had befallen me on the journey out and brought me into contact with a person whose name you would all know if I were to mention it, the Princess gave a startled little cry.

“‘What’s the matter, my dearest Princess?’ I asked.

“She pointed to the other end of the gallery.

“‘It’s my husband’s mother,’ she whispered. ‘She must have had a suspicion and followed us. What shall I do?’

“I looked, and perceived a large and stately old lady in gold eyeglasses approaching us. There was but one door to the gallery, and the approach

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to that was barred by the Princess's mother-in-law. In another moment she would be upon us, and, although I knew her to be near-sighted, I could not hope that she would fail to recognize Nadia. If something were not done at once, we were ruined.

"Now I never boast or make myself out cleverer than I am. I admit freely that I was at my wits' end. I could do nothing and think of nothing. Our salvation was due not to me, but to the quick woman's wit which lay in Nadia's perfect little head.

"'Quick!' she whispered. 'Step up on the platform — there — beside Kant. Fold your arms. Frown. That's right. What's that society you told me you belonged to — the one that has the animals?'

"'The Zoological,' I answered.

"'Yes, that's it. Stand quite still.'

"I obeyed her, and she seized from the feet of Isaac Newton a placard bearing a notice in Russian and French, 'It is strictly forbidden to touch the figures. Offenders will be prosecuted with the utmost rigor of the law' (not a light matter, mind you, in Russia). She propped the board up against my legs, whispered, 'Be sure you don't wink!' and with a gracious, winning smile advanced

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to meet her mother-in-law. I had never admired her more than at that moment.

“‘Why, have you heard of it too?’ she exclaimed.

“‘Nadia! What are you doing here? Are you alone?’

“‘Of course, dear. I came to see the model. Did n’t you?’

“‘What model, child?’

“‘Why, of our friend Mr. Dexter.’

“‘That young man!’

“‘Yes. Don’t you know he’s one of the greatest zoölogists in the world, and Marribon has just put up a model of him? Look, here it is!’

“I don’t know that I’m more nervous than other people, but it was, I confess, a trying moment when the old lady put up her eyeglasses and stared at me. Dear Nadia stuck her pretty head on one side in a critical way, and said —

“‘I don’t call it *very* good. Do you? It’s too stiff and unnatural.’

“The old lady said nothing: she came a step nearer and raised her parasol. The old wretch was going to *poke* me!

“‘Oh, but you must n’t touch it!’ cried Nadia, turning pale. ‘Look at the notice!’

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"The old lady advanced her parasol. But at this moment one of the police appeared at her elbow.

"‘You must n’t touch the figures, madame,’ said he, and I blessed him for every word.

"Never a word did the old Princess speak. She glared at me, she glared at Nadia, and she glared at the policeman—and she turned round and walked out of the gallery. The policeman followed her. Nadia softly clapped her hands: I sprang forward, seized her slim fingers, and kissed them.

"‘Oh, we’re not safe yet,’ she said. ‘My mother-in-law suspects. Luckily the place closes in a quarter of an hour, and she can’t do anything to-night; and the Prince won’t be back from Moscow till the day after to-morrow. Jack, there must be a real model of you by then.’

"I was amazed, but I listened to her instructions. Taking out her purse, she pressed it on me. I refused, but on finding that I had only a five-pound note with me I was compelled to accept twenty thousand roubles (the X.’s are fabulously rich, you know). I escorted the Princess to a cab, and then I called on the proprietor of the exhibition.

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“Well, to make a long story short, I — or rather the Princess’s roubles — (I kept one, and wear it now on my watch-chain — see, here it is!) — overcame Madame Marribon’s surprise and swept away her scruples. I admitted that she might, not naturally, never have heard of Professor Dexter, but I told her that the name was a household word in all cultivated circles in Europe and America; and I promised her to pay all expenses and ten thousand roubles if a portrait model of the great zoölogist stood beside Kant in thirty-six hours. The result was that by six o’clock in the evening I was sitting in an arm-chair, and young M. Marribon was taking a cast of my features in plaster-of-Paris. At this moment, however, there occurred an interruption which, if it had come a little sooner, would have ruined the whole affair.

“As I sat, covered with the plaster, except where holes were left for sight and breathing, I saw, to my consternation, the same policeman who had been in the gallery in the afternoon enter the room. He brought with him an official notice.

“‘Order from the Minister of the Interior,’ he said. ‘You’re to close to-morrow — Day of Intercession for the safety of the Tsar ordered, and all public exhibits to be closed.’

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"I rejoiced to hear that — it smoothed my way; but I wished the policeman would take himself off.

"‘Hullo!’ he said. ‘Who have we here? I must have his name, please.’

"‘This is Mr. Dexter, the great zoölogist.’

"‘Who’s he? Come, Monsieur Marribon, I must have that stuff off his face, you know. Why, he might be a Nihilist, or anybody you like, and me none the wiser, with that stuff on him.’

"‘But, my dear sir,’ pleaded Marribon, ‘the stuff won’t come off. If I try to remove it before it hardens, it will tear off his skin with it.’ (That is the case with plaster-of-Paris, you know, Colonel.)

"‘Can’t help it,’ said the brute. ‘I’ve got my orders, and no distinction is made as to the effect on the skin. I must see his face.’

"‘Oh, impossible!’ cried Marribon. ‘It would be a barbarity! It will be dry in fifteen minutes.’

"‘Then I’ll wait,’ said the man, and he sat down.

"As you may suppose, my brain was busy during those fifteen minutes. If I could speak alone to Marribon for an instant, I saw my way. An idea struck me. Speaking as well as I could through the mouth-hole, I suggested that we were

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probably all thirsty, and I held out some roubles. Would the gentleman fetch some brandy? He wavered and fell. He was gone five minutes. When he returned my face was uncovered, and Marribon richer by some valuable instructions and a couple of thousand more roubles.

“‘Why, you’ve got a figure of him already!’ cried the policeman.

“‘Certainly we had; but Mr. Dexter was not satisfied with it, so I have taken advantage of his visit here to take a fresh cast.’

“‘The man looked suspicious.

“‘Where’s the old one?’ he asked.

“‘It’s melted down,’ said Marribon suavely, as he poured out the brandy.

“That peril was past. My next visit was to Marribon’s advertising agents. By next morning we flooded the town with posters, announcing the new and interesting addition to the exhibition. I received scores of congratulations on my distinction, and also on my singular modesty, for nobody in Russia had ever heard of my fame as a zoölogist before. I accepted the kind words of my friends with gratitude, and I invited a large company to lunch on the following day, proposing that we should afterwards go and view the model

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My guests included Prince and Princess X. and the Prince's mother.

"Behold us, then, the next day in the gallery! Nadia and I were somewhat nervous, the Prince as glum as usual, the old lady very curious, and the rest of the company politely interested. There was the model: and I'm bound to say that it was not a good one.

"'Yes,' said Nadia, 'it *is* stiff and awkward. I said so before to your mother, Prince.'

"'Did you?' he growled.

"Then the old lady, who had been examining the figure carefully, burst out in acid triumph.

"'It's not the figure I saw! What's the meaning of this? The one I saw had a red flower in its buttonhole. Nadia what's the meaning of this?'

"The poor girl flushed crimson, but I interposed with great suavity—

"'You are perfectly right, Princess. The figure is not the same. The one you saw was an experiment—a trial. It was considered unsatisfactory, and was melted down. This is a new one. Is n't that so, Monsieur Marribon?'

"'It is so, Monsieur,' said Marribon, who was accompanying our distinguished party.

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“But,” cried the old lady, ‘the one I saw was a thousand times better—it was most lifelike.’

“Oh, did you think so, dear?” protested Nadia.

“Suddenly the Prince turned furiously to Marribon.

“‘Speak the truth,’ he cried, ‘as you told it to me at the police bureau this morning.’

“The wretch looked at me with an expression of helpless apology. And behind him I saw that policeman!

“‘Does Monsieur le Prince cite Monsieur Marribon to contradict me?’ I asked haughtily.

“‘You’ll hear what he says—the truth, sir, not the lies you bribed him to tell.’

“Marribon had sold me! No doubt the policeman had smelt a rat, and the Prince’s threats had done the rest. In a trembling voice the wretch began to repeat the whole story of how I went to him. The old Princess’s eyes blazed with triumphant malice, the Prince listened with a grim smile, and poor Nadia was as pale as a ghost. And, as you may suppose, I was very uncomfortable.

“‘Then,’ asked the prince, ‘there was no figure of this gentleman here at all the day before yesterday?’

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“‘None, your Highness.’

“‘Yet my mother saw one—and you, policeman, saw one?’

“The police stepped forward.

“‘I saw a figure, your Highness,’ said he.

“‘I think we will ask Mr. Dexter to explain,’ grinned the Prince. ‘Otherwise we must come to the conclusion that there was no figure.’

“I had nothing to say.

“‘And,’ he pursued, ‘that a trick has been played, and that the pretended figure was Mr. Dexter himself, who undertook this deception for motives not hard to guess,’ and he stared cruelly at the helpless Nadia.

“Every one was silent. The truth seemed now too plain to be denied. I saw what would happen. My portrait would be ignominiously ordered off, I ran a risk of worse things, and I did not dare to think what would happen to poor Nadia, who, overcome by shame, began to shed tears.

“At this moment a quiet, grave voice was heard. Everybody listened, for it proceeded from the Grand Duke A., who was (I forget whether I mentioned it before) one of my guests.

“‘I can understand the Princess’s indignation

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and the emotion she shows,' said the Grand Duke. 'What I do not understand (and I desire to speak with all respect to Prince X.) is the remarkable scene to which we have been treated. What may be the motives of this rogue (he indicated Marribon) I do not know, but I am so happy as to be able to bear testimony, which will command, I venture to think, at least as much attention as that of a fellow who comes forward with such a tale. Pray, Prince X., are you willing to accept my word against that of your wax-work-maker and your policeman?'

"Every one was astounded, I most of all. Nadia looked up with a gleam of hope in her eyes. Of course the Prince could do nothing but bow deferentially and say —

"'Whatever your Imperial Highness speaks to needs, sir, no confirmation, and is affected by no contradiction.'

"'I am obliged to you,' said the Grand Duke stiffly. 'What I have to say is simply this — that in the morning of the day before yesterday, at the invitation of my good and distinguished friend Mr. Dexter (whose merits the Tsar, no less than myself, is delighted to see recognized) I accompanied him to this gallery, *incognito*, for the

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purpose of giving him my opinion on the experimental figure. The figure was then in its place, and I inspected it in company with Mr. Dexter himself. It will hardly be suggested that I saw double.'

"He ceased. I dared not look at him. The Prince and his mother were confounded, but they could say nothing. Nadia was full of gratitude, and began to thank the Grand Duke warmly.

" 'I have only said what any gentleman would,' said the Grand Duke, bowing respectfully to her.

"In fact we triumphed all along the line—and there stands the model of me to this day, unless, of course, it has been removed since I was there."

Jack threw himself back in his chair and finished his whiskey. Then he took up his hat.

"And what became of Marribon?" I asked.

"He got twelve months, the rascal, for slander. The Prince was forced to do it by the Grand Duke."

"But, Jack," said the colonel, "why did the Grand Duke—"

"Oh, well," said Jack, "he was a very gallant man, and—this between ourselves, you know—he had a *tendresse* for Nadia himself. She never

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returned it—why, of course, I don't know—which makes his conduct all the more handsome.”

He rose and moved towards the door.

“She was a woman of great presence of mind, your Princess,” some one observed.

“Wonderful!” said Jack. “And of even more marvellous beauty,” and he laid his hand on the door.

“What became of her?” cried the colonel. “Do you ever see her now?”

“Never. I never shall again,” said Jack, in tones of deep emotion, as he opened the door.

“But, good gracious, what's happened to her?”

Jack turned round, as he was halfway out of the room; he shook his head sadly, cleared his throat, and ejaculated one terrible word—

“Siberia!”

And he shut the door.

Trix's Wooing



I MUST confess at once that at first, at least, I very much admired the curate. I am not referring to my admiration of his fine figure — six feet high and straight as an arrow — nor of his handsome, open, ingenuous countenance, or his candid blue eye, or his thick curly hair. No; what won my heart from an early period of my visit to my cousins, the Poltons of Polton Park, was the fervent, undisguised, unashamed, confident, and altogether matter-of-course manner in which he made love to Miss Beatrice Queenborough, only daughter and heiress of the wealthy ship-owner Sir Wagstaff Queenborough, Bart., and Eleanor his wife. It was purely the manner of the curate's advances that took my fancy: in the mere fact of them there was nothing remarkable. For all the men in the house (and a good many outside) made covert, stealthy, and indirect steps in

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the same direction; for Trix (as her friends called her) was, if not wise, at least pretty and witty, displaying to the material eye a charming figure, and to the mental a delicate heartlessness — both attributes which challenge a self-respecting man's best efforts. But then came the fatal obstacle. From heiresses in reason a gentleman need neither shrink nor let himself be driven; but when it comes to something like twenty thousand a year — the reported amount of Trix's *dot* — he distrusts his own motives almost as much as the lady's relatives distrust them for him. We all felt this — Stanton, Rippleby, and I; and, although I will not swear that we spoke no tender words and gave no meaning glances, yet we reduced such concessions to natural weakness to a minimum, not only when Lady Queenborough was by, but at all times. To say the truth, we had no desire to see our scalps affixed to Miss Trix's pretty belt, nor to have our hearts broken (like that of the young man in the poem) before she went to Homburg in the autumn.

With the curate it was otherwise. He — Jack Ives, by the way, was his name — appeared to rush, not only upon his fate, but in the face of all possibility and of Lady Queenborough. My

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cousin and hostess, Dora Polton, was very much distressed about him. She said that he was such a nice young fellow, and that it was a great pity to see him preparing such unhappiness for himself. Nay, I happen to know that she spoke very seriously to Trix, pointing out the wickedness of trifling with him; whereupon Trix, who maintained a bowing acquaintance with her conscience, avoided him for a whole afternoon and endangered all Algy Stanton's prudent resolutions by taking him out in a Canadian canoe. This demonstration in no way perturbed the curate. He observed that, as there was nothing better to do, we might as well play billiards, and proceeded to defeat me in three games of a hundred up (no, it is quite immaterial whether we played for anything or not), after which he told Dora that the vicar was taking the evening service—it happened to be the day when there was one at the parish church—a piece of information only relevant in so far as it suggested that Mr. Ives could accept an invitation to dinner if one were proffered to him. Dora, very weakly, rose to the bait; Jack Ives airily remarking that there was no use in ceremony among friends, siezed the place next to Trix at dinner (her mother was just opposite) and walked on

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the terrace after dinner with her in the moonlight.

When the ladies retired he came into the smoking-room, drank a whiskey-and-soda, said that Miss Queenborough was really a very charming companion, and apologized for leaving us early on the ground that his sermon was still unwritten. My good cousin, the squire, suggested rather grimly that a discourse on the vanity of human wishes might be appropriate.

"I shall preach," said Mr. Ives thoughtfully, "on the opportunities of wealth."

This resolution he carried out on the next day but one, that being a Sunday. I had the pleasure of sitting next to Miss Trix, and I watched her with some interest as Mr. Ives developed his theme. I will not try to reproduce the sermon, which would have seemed by no means a bad one, had any of our party been able to ignore the personal application which we read into it: for its main burden was no other than this—that wealth should be used by those who were fortunate enough to possess it (here Trix looked down and fidgeted with her prayer-book) as a means for promoting greater union between themselves and the less richly endowed, and not—as, alas, had

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too often been the case — as though it were a new barrier set up between them and their fellow-creatures. (Here Miss Trix blushed slightly, and had recourse to her smelling-bottle.) “You,” said the curate, waxing rhetorical as he addressed an imaginary, but bloated, capitalist, “have no more right to your money than I have. It is intrusted to you to be shared with me.” At this point I heard Lady Queenborough sniff, and Algy Stanton snigger. I stole a glance at Trix and detected a slight waver in the admirable lines of her mouth.

“A very good sermon, did n’t you think?” I said to her, as we walked home.

“Oh, very,” she replied demurely.

“Ah, if we followed all we heard in church!” I sighed.

Miss Trix walked in silence for a few yards. By dint of never becoming anything else, we had become very good friends; and presently she remarked, quite confidentially:

“He’s very silly, is n’t he?”

“Then you ought to snub him,” said I, severely.

“So I do — sometimes. He’s rather amusing, though.”

“Of course, if you’re prepared to make the sacrifice involved —”

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"Oh, what nonsense!"

"Then you've no business to amuse yourself with him."

"Dear, dear! how moral you are!" said Trix.

The next development in the situation was this. My cousin Dora received a letter from the Marquis of Newhaven, with whom she was acquainted, praying her to allow him to run down to Polton's for a few days: he reminded her that she had once given him a general invitation: if it would not be inconvenient—and so forth. The meaning of this communication did not, of course, escape my cousin, who had witnessed the writer's attentions to Trix in the preceding season, nor did it escape the rest of us (who had talked over the said attentions at the club) when she told us about it, and announced that Lord Newhaven would arrive in the middle of the next day. Trix affected dense unconsciousness; her mother allowed herself a mysterious smile—which, however, speedily vanished when the curate (he was taking lunch with us) observed in a cheerful tone:

"Newhaven! oh, I remember the chap at the House—ploughed twice at Small's—stumpy fellow, is n't he? Not a bad chap, though, you know, barring his looks. I'm glad he's coming."

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"You won't be soon, young man," Lady Queenborough's angry eye seemed to say.

"I remember him," pursued Jack, "awfully smitten with a tobacconist's daughter in the Corn — oh, it's all *right*, Lady Queenborough — she would n't look at him."

This quasi-apology was called forth by the fact of Lady Queenborough pushing back her chair and making for the door. It did not at all appease her to hear of the scorn of the tobacconist's daughter. She glared sternly at Jack, and disappeared. He turned to Trix and reminded her — without diffidence and *coram populo*, as his habit was — that she had promised him a stroll in the west wood.

What happened on the stroll I do not know; but meeting Miss Trix on the stairs later in the afternoon, I ventured to remark :

"I hope you broke it to him gently, Miss Queenborough?"

"I don't know what you mean," replied Trix, haughtily.

"You were out nearly two hours," said I.

"Were we?" asked Trix with a start. "Good gracious! Where was mamma, Mr. Wynne?"

"On the lawn — watch in hand."

Miss Trix went slowly upstairs, and there is not

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the least doubt that something serious passed between her and her mother, for both of them were in the most atrocious of humors that evening; fortunately the curate was not there. He had a Bible class.

The next day Lord Newhaven arrived. I found him on the lawn when I strolled up, after a spell of letter-writing, about four o'clock. Lawn-tennis was the order of the day, and we were all in flannels.

"Oh, here's Mark," cried Dora, seeing me.

"Now, Mark, you and Mr. Ives had better play against Trix and Lord Newhaven. That'll make a very good set."

"No, no, Mrs. Polton," said Jack Ives. "They would n't have a chance. Look here, I'll play with Miss Queenborough against Lord Newhaven and Wynne."

Newhaven—whose appearance, by the way, though hardly distinguished, was not quite so unornamental as the curate had led us to expect—looked slightly displeased, but Jack gave him no time for remonstrance. He whisked Trix off, and began to serve all in a moment. I had a vision of Lady Queenborough approaching from the house with face aghast. The set went on;

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and, owing entirely to Newhaven's absurd chivalry in sending all the balls to Jack Ives instead of following the well-known maxim to "pound away at the lady," they beat us. Jack wiped his brow, strolled up to the tea-table with Trix, and remarked in exultant tones:

"We make a perfect couple, Miss Queenborough; we ought never to be separated."

Dora did not ask the curate to dinner that night, but he dropped in about nine o'clock to ask her opinion as to the hymns on Sunday; and finding Miss Trix and Newhaven in the small drawing-room he sat down and talked to them. This was too much for Trix; she had treated him very kindly and had allowed him to amuse her; but it was impossible to put up with presumption of that kind. Difficult as it was to discourage Mr. Ives, she did it, and he went away with a disconsolate, puzzled expression. At the last moment, however, Trix so far relented as to express a hope that he was coming to tennis to-morrow, at which he brightened up a little. I do not wish to be uncharitable—least of all to a charming young lady—but my opinion is that Miss Trix did not wish to set the curate altogether adrift. I think, however, that Lady Queen-

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borough must have spoken again, for when Jack did come to tennis, Trix treated him with the most freezing civility and a hardly disguised disdain, and devoted herself to Lord Newhaven with as much assiduity as her mother could wish. We men, over our pipes, expressed the opinion that Jack Ives's little hour of sunshine was passed, and that nothing was left to us both but to look on at the prosperous uneventful course of Lord Newhaven's wooing. Trix had had her fun (so Algy Stanton bluntly phrased it) and would not settle down to business.

"I believe, though," he added, "that she likes the curate a bit, you know."

During the whole of the next day — Wednesday — Jack Ives kept away; he had, apparently, accepted the inevitable, and was healing his wounded heart by a strict attention to his parochial duties. Newhaven remarked on his absence with an air of relief; and Miss Trix treated it as a matter of no importance; Lady Queenborough was all smiles; and Dora Polton restricted herself to exclaiming, as I sat by her at tea, in a low tone and *à propos* of nothing in particular, "Oh, well — poor Mr. Ives!"

But on Thursday there occurred an event, the

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significance of which passed at the moment unperceived, but which had, in fact, most important results. This was no other than the arrival of little Mrs. Wentworth, an intimate friend of Dora's. Mrs. Wentworth had been left a widow early in life; she possessed a comfortable competence; she was not handsome, but she was vivacious, amusing, and, above all, sympathetic. She sympathized at once with Lady Queenborough in her maternal anxieties, with Trix on her charming romance, with Newhaven on his sweet devotions, with the rest of us in our obvious desolation — and, after a confidential chat with Dora, she sympathized most strongly with poor Mr. Ives on his unfortunate attachment. Nothing would satisfy her, so Dora told me, except the opportunity of plying Mr. Ives with her soothing balm; and Dora was about to sit down and write him a note, when he strolled in through the drawing-room window, and announced that his cook's mother was ill, and that he should be very much obliged if Mrs. Polton would give him some dinner that evening. Trix and Newhaven happened to enter by the door at the same moment, and Jack darted up to them, and shook hands with the greatest effusion. He

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had evidently buried all unkindness — and with it, we hoped, his mistaken folly. However that might be, he made no effort to engross Trix, but took his seat most docilely by his hostess — and she, of course, introduced him to Mrs. Wentworth. His behavior, was, in fact, so exemplary, that even Lady Queenborough relaxed her severity, and condescended to cross-examine him on the morals and manners of the old women of the parish. “Oh, the vicar looks after them,” said Jack; and he turned to Mrs. Wentworth again.

There can be no doubt that Mrs. Wentworth had a remarkable power of sympathy. I took her in to dinner, and she was deep in the subject of my “noble and inspiring art,” before the soup was off the table. Indeed, I’m sure that my life’s ambitions would have been an open book to her by the time the joint arrived, had not Jack Ives, who was sitting on the lady’s other side, cut into the conversation just as Mrs. Wentworth was comparing my early struggles with those of Mr. Carlyle. After this intervention of Jack’s I had not a chance. I ate my dinner without the sauce of sympathy, substituting for it a certain amusement which I derived from studying the face of Miss Trix Queenborough, who was placed on

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the opposite side of the table. And if Trix did look now and again at Mrs. Wentworth and Jack Ives, I cannot say that her conduct was unnatural. To tell the truth, Jack was so obviously delighted with his new friend that it was quite pleasant — and, as I say, under the circumstances, rather amusing — to watch them. We felt that the Squire was justified in having a hit at Jack when Jack said, in the smoking-room, that he found himself rather at a loss for a subject for his next sermon.

“What do you say,” suggested my cousin, puffing at his pipe, “to take constancy as your text?”

Jack considered the idea for a moment, but then he shook his head.

“No. I think,” he said, reflectively, “that I shall preach on the power of human sympathy.”

That sermon afforded me — I must confess it, at the risk of seeming frivolous — very great entertainment. Again I secured a place by Miss Trix — on her left, Newhaven being on her right, and her face was worth study when Jack Ives gave us a most eloquent description of the wonderful gift in question. It was, he said, the essence and the crown of true womanliness, and it showed itself —

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well, to put it quite plainly, it showed itself, according to Jack Ives, in exactly that sort of manner and bearing which so honorably and gracefully distinguished Mrs. Wentworth. The lady was not, of course, named, but she was clearly indicated. "Your gift, your precious gift," cried the curate, apostrophizing the impersonation of sympathy, "is given to you, not for your profit, but for mine. It is yours, but it is a trust to be used for me. It is yours, in fact, to share with me." At this climax, which must have struck upon her ear with a certain familiarity, Miss Trix Queenborough, notwithstanding the place and occasion, tossed her pretty head and whispered to me, "What horrid stuff!"

In the ensuing week Jack Ives was our constant companion; the continued illness of his servant's mother left him stranded, and Dora's kind heart at once offered him the hospitality of her roof. For my part I was glad, for the little drama which now began was not without its interest. It was a pleasant change to see Jack genially polite to Trix Queenborough, but quite indifferent to her presence or absence, and content to allow her to take Newhaven for her partner at tennis as often as she pleased. He himself was often

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an absentee from our games. Mrs. Wentworth did not play, and Jack would sit under the trees with her, or take her out in the canoe. What Trix thought I did not know, but it is a fact that she treated poor Newhaven like dirt beneath her feet, and that Lady Queenborough's face began to lose its transiently pleasant expression. I had a vague idea that a retribution was working itself out, and disposed myself to see the process with all the complacency induced by the spectacle of others receiving punishment for their sins.

A little scene which occurred after lunch one day was significant. I was sitting on the terrace, ready booted and breeched, waiting for my horse to be brought round. Trix came out and sat down by me.

"Where's Newhaven?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't always want Newhaven," she exclaimed petulantly; "I sent him off for a walk—I'm going out in the Canadian canoe with Mr. Ives."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said I, smiling. As I spoke, Jack Ives ran up to us.

"I say, Miss Queenborough," he cried, "I've just got your message saying you'd let me take you on the lake."

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"Is it a great bore?" asked Trix, with a glance—a glance that meant mischief.

"I should like it awfully, of course," said Jack; "but the fact is I've promised to take Mrs. Wentworth—before I got your message, you know."

Trix drew herself up.

"Of course, if Mrs. Wentworth—" she began.

"I'm very sorry," said Jack.

Then Miss Queenborough, forgetting—as I hope—or choosing to disregard my presence, leant forward and asked in her most coaxing tones :

"Don't you ever forget a promise, Mr. Ives?"

Jack looked at her. I suppose her dainty prettiness struck him afresh, for he wavered and hesitated.

"She's gone upstairs," pursued the tempter, "and we shall be safe away before she comes down again."

Jack shuffled with one foot on the gravel.

"I tell you what," he said. "I'll ask her if she minds me taking you for a little while before I—"

I believe he really thought that he had hit upon a compromise satisfactory to all parties.

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If so, he was speedily undeceived. Trix flushed red and answered angrily:

"Pray don't trouble. I don't want to go."

"Perhaps afterwards you might—" suggested the curate, but now rather timidly.

"I'm going out with Lord Newhaven," said she. And she added in an access of uncontrollable annoyance, "Go, please go, I—I don't want you."

Jack sheered off, with a look of puzzled shamefacedness. He disappeared into the house. Nothing passed between Miss Trix and myself. A moment later Newhaven came out.

"Why, Miss Queenborough," said he, in apparent surprise, "Ives is going with Mrs. Wentworth in the canoe!"

In an instant I saw what she had done. In rash presumption she had told Newhaven that she was going with the curate—and now the curate had refused to take her—and Newhaven had met him in search of Mrs. Wentworth. What could she do? Well, she rose—or fell—to the occasion. In the coldest of voices she said:

"I thought you'd gone for your walk."

"I was just starting," he answered apologetically, "when I met Ives. But, as you were n't going

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with him—" He paused, an inquiring look in his eyes. He was evidently asking himself whether she had not gone with the curate.

"I'd rather be left alone, if you don't mind," said she. And then, flushing red again, she added "I changed my mind and refused to go with Mr. Ives. So he went off to get Mr. Wentworth instead."

I started. Newhaven looked at her for a moment, and then turned on his heel. She turned to me quick as lightning, and with her face all aflame—

"If you tell, I'll never speak to you again," she whispered.

After this there was silence for some minutes.

"Well?" she said, without looking at me.

"I have no remark to offer, Miss Queenborough," I returned.

"I suppose that was a lie, was n't it?" she asked defiantly.

"It's not my business to say what it was or was not," I answered.

"I know what you're thinking."

"I was thinking," said I, "which I would rather be—the man you will marry, or the man you would like—"

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"How dare you? It's not true. Oh, Mr. Wynne, indeed it's not true!"

Whether it were true or not I did not know. But if it had been, Miss Trix Queenborough might have been expected to act very much in the way in which she proceeded to act; that is to say, to be extravagantly attentive to Lord Newhaven when Jack Ives was present, and markedly neglectful of him in the curate's absence. It also fitted in very well with the theory which I had ventured to hint, that her bearing towards Mrs. Wentworth was distinguished by a stately civility, and her remarks about that lady by a superfluity of laudation; for if these be not two distinguishing marks of rivalry in the well-bred, I must go back to my favorite books and learn from them — more folly; and if Trix's manners were all that they should be, praise no less high must be accorded to Mrs. Wentworth's; she attained an altitude of admirable unconsciousness, and conducted her flirtations (the poverty of language forces me to the word, but it is over flippant) with the curate in a staid, quasi-maternal way. She called him a delightful boy, and said that she was intensely interested in all his aims and hopes.

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"What does she want?" I asked Dora, despairingly. "She can't want to marry him." I was referring to Trix Queenborough, not to Mrs. Wentworth.

"Good gracious, no!" answered Dora, irritably. "It's simple jealousy. She won't let the poor boy alone till he's in love with her again. It's a horrible shame!"

"Oh, well, he has great recuperative power," said I.

"She'd better be careful, though. It's a very dangerous game. How do you suppose Lord Newhaven likes it?"

Accident gave me that very day a hint how little Lord Newhaven liked it, and a glimpse of the risk Miss Trix was running. Entering the library suddenly, I heard Newhaven's voice raised from his ordinary tones.

"I won't stand it," he was declaring. "I never know how she'll be treating me from one minute to the next."

My entrance, of course, stopped the conversation very abruptly. Newhaven had come to stand in the middle of the room, and Lady Queenborough sat on the sofa, a formidable frown on her brow. Withdrawing myself as rapidly as

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possible, I argued the possibility of a severe lecture for Miss Trix, ending in a command to try her noble suitor's patience no longer. I hope all this happened, for I, not seeing why Mrs. Wentworth should monopolize the grace of sympathy, took the liberty of extending mine to Newhaven. He was certainly in love with Trix, not with her money, and the treatment he underwent must have been as trying to his feelings as it was galling to his pride.

My sympathy was not premature, for Miss Trix's fascinations, which were indubitably great, began to have their effect. The scene about the canoe was re-enacted, but with a different dénouement. This time the promise was forgotten, and the widow forsaken. Then Mrs. Wentworth put on her armor. We had, in fact, reached this very absurd situation, that these two ladies were contending for the favors of, or the domination over, such an obscure, poverty-stricken, hopelessly ineligible person as the curate of Polton's undoubtedly was. The position seemed to me then, and still seems, to indicate some remarkable qualities in that young man.

At last Newhaven made a move. At breakfast, on Wednesday morning, he announced that,

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reluctant as he should be to leave Polton's Park, he was due at his aunt's place, in Kent, on Saturday evening, and must therefore make his arrangements to leave by noon on that day. The significance was apparent. Had he come down to breakfast with "Now or Never!" stamped in fiery letters across his brow, it would have been more obtrusive, indeed, but not a whit plainer. We all looked down at our plates, except Jack Ives. He flung one glance (I saw it out of the corner of my left eye) at Newhaven, another at Trix; then he remarked kindly :

"We shall be uncommonly sorry to lose you, Newhaven."

Events began to happen now, and I will tell them as well as I am able, supplementing my own knowledge by what I learnt afterwards from Dora — she having learnt it from the actors in the scene. In spite of the solemn warning conveyed in Newhaven's intimation, Trix, greatly daring, went off immediately after lunch for what she described as "a long ramble" with Mr. Ives. There was, indeed, the excuse of an old woman at the end of the ramble, and Trix provided Jack with a small basket of comforts for the useful old body; but the ramble was, we felt, the thing, and I was

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much annoyed at not being able to accompany the walkers in the cloak of darkness or other invisible contrivance. The ramble consumed three hours — full measure. Indeed, it was half past six before Trix, alone, walked up the drive. Newhaven, a solitary figure, paced up and down the terrace fronting the drive. Trix came on, her head thrown back and a steady smile on her lips. She saw Newhaven: he stood looking at her for a moment with what she afterwards described as an indescribable smile on his face, but not, as Dora understood from her, by any means a pleasant one. Yet, if not pleasant, there is not the least doubt in the world that it was highly significant; for she cried out nervously, "Why are you looking at me like that? What's the matter?"

Newhaven, still saying nothing, turned his back on her and made as if he would walk into the house and leave her there, ignored, discarded, done with. She, realizing the crisis which had come, forgetting everything except the imminent danger of losing him once for all, without time for long explanation or any round-about seductions, ran forward, laying her hand on his arm and blurting out —

"But I've refused him."

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I do not know what Newhaven thinks now, but I sometimes doubt whether he would not have been wiser to shake off the detaining hand and pursue his lonely way, first into the house, and ultimately to his aunt's. But (to say nothing of the twenty thousand a year, which, after all, and be you as romantic as you may please to be, is not a thing to be sneezed at) Trix's face, its mingled eagerness and shame, its flushed cheeks and shining eyes, the piquancy of its unwonted humility, overcame him. He stopped dead.

"I — I was obliged to give him an — an opportunity," said Miss Trix, having the grace to stumble a little in her speech. "And — and it's all your fault."

The war was thus, by happy audacity, carried into Newhaven's own quarters.

"My fault!" he exclaimed. "My fault that you walk all day with that curate!"

Then Miss Trix — and let no irrelevant considerations mar the appreciation of fine acting — dropped her eyes and murmured softly:

"I — I was so terribly afraid of seeming to expect *you*."

Wherewith she (and not he) ran away, lightly, up the stairs, turning just one glance downwards as

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she reached the landing. Newhaven was looking up from below with an "enchanted" smile — the word is Trix's own : I should probably have used a different one.

Was then the curate of Polton's utterly defeated — brought to his knees, only to be spurned ? It seemed so : and he came down to dinner that night with a subdued and melancholy expression. Trix, on the other hand, was brilliant and talkative to the last degree, and the gayety spread from her all round the table, leaving untouched only the rejected lover and Mrs. Wentworth ; for the last-named lady, true to her distinguishing quality, had begun to talk to poor Jack Ives in low, soothing tones.

After dinner Trix was not visible ; but the door of the little boudoir beyond stood half open, and very soon Newhaven edged his way through. Almost at the same moment Jack Ives and Mrs. Wentworth passed out of the window and began to walk up and down the gravel. Nobody but myself appeared to notice these remarkable occurrences, but I watched them with keen interest. Half an hour passed and then there smote on my watchful ear the sound of a low laugh from the boudoir. It was followed almost immediately

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by a stranger sound from the gravel walk. Then, all in a moment, two things happened. The boudoir door opened, and Trix, followed by Newhaven, came in smiling; from the window entered Jack Ives and Mrs. Wentworth. My eyes were on the curate. He gave one sudden comprehending glance towards the other couple; then he took the widow's hand, led her up to Dora and said, in low and yet penetrating tones:

"Will you wish us joy, Mrs. Polton?"

The Squire, Rippleby, and Algy Stanton were round them in an instant. I kept my place, watching now the face of Trix Queenborough. She turned first flaming red, then very pale. I saw her turn to Newhaven and speak one or two urgent, imperative words to him. Then, drawing herself up to her full height, she crossed the room to where the group was assembled round Mrs. Wentworth and Jack Ives.

"What's the matter? What are you saying?" she asked.

Mrs. Wentworth's eyes were modestly cast down, but a smile played round her mouth. No one spoke for a moment. Then Jack Ives said:

"Mrs. Wentworth has promised to be my wife, Miss Queenborough."

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For a moment, hardly perceptible, Trix hesitated ; then, with the most winning, touching, sweetest smile in the world, she said :

“ So you took my advice, and our afternoon walk was not wasted after all ! ”

Mrs. Polton is not used to these fine flights of diplomacy ; she had heard before dinner something of what had actually happened in the afternoon ; and the simple woman positively jumped. Jack Ives met Trix's scornful eyes full and square.

“ Not at all wasted,” said he with a smile. “ Not only has it shown me where my true happiness lies, but it has also given me a juster idea of the value and sincerity of your regard for me, Miss Queenborough.”

“ It is as real, Mr. Ives, as it is sincere,” said she.

“ It is like yourself, Miss Queenborough,” said he, with a little bow ; and he turned from her and began to talk to his *fiancée*.

Trix Queenborough moved slowly towards where I sat. Newhaven was watching her from where he stood alone on the other side of the room.

“ And have you no news for us ? ” I asked in low tones.

“ Thank you,” she said haughtily ; “ I don't care

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that mine should be a pendant to the great tidings about the little widow and the curate."

After a moment's pause she went on :

"He lost no time, did he? He was wise to secure her before what happened this afternoon could leak out. Nobody can tell her now."

"This afternoon?"

"He asked me to marry him this afternoon."

"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"Well, his behavior is in outrageously bad taste, but —"

She laid a hand on my arm, and said in calm, level tones :

"I refused him because I dared not have him; but I told him I cared for him, and he said he loved me. And I let him kiss me. Good-night, Mr. Wynne."

I sat still and silent. Newhaven came across to us. Trix put out her hand and caught him by the sleeve.

"Fred," she said, "my dear, honest old Fred, you love me, don't you?"

Newhaven, much embarrassed and surprised, looked at me in alarm. But her hand was in his now, and her eyes imploring him.

Trix's Wooing

"I should rather think I did, my dear," said he.

I really hope that Lord and Lady Newhaven will not be very unhappy, while Mrs. Ives quite worships her husband, and is convinced that she eclipsed the brilliant and wealthy Miss Queenborough. Perhaps she did — perhaps not. There are, as I have said, great qualities in the curate of Polton's, but I have not quite made up my mind precisely what they are. I ought, however, to say that Dora takes a more favorable view of him and a less lenient view of Trix than I. That is perhaps natural. Besides, Dora does not know the precise manner in which the curate was refused. By the way, he preached next Sunday on the text, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Miss Audrey Liston, Authoress



IT was, I believe, mainly as a compliment to me that Miss Audrey Liston was asked to Polton's. Miss Liston and I were very good friends, and my cousin Dora Polton thought as she informed me, that it would be nice for me to have some one I could talk to about "books and so on." I did not complain. Miss Liston was a pleasant young woman of six and-twenty; I liked her very much except on paper, and I was aware that she made it a point of duty to read something at least of what I wrote. She was in the habit of describing herself as an "authoress in a small way." If I were pointed out that six three-volume novels in three years (the term of her literary activity at the time of which I write) could hardly be called "a small way," she would smile modestly;

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and say that it was not really much; and if she were told that the English language embraced no such word as "authoress," she would smile again and say that it ought to, a position towards the bugbear of correctness with which, I confess, I sympathize in some degree. She was very diligent; she worked from ten to one every day while she was at Polton's; how much she wrote is between her and her conscience.

There was another impeachment which Miss Liston was hardly at the trouble to deny. "Take your characters from life!" she would exclaim. "Surely every artist (Miss Liston often referred to herself as an artist) must!" And she would proceed to maintain — what is perhaps true sometimes — that people rather liked being put into books, just as they liked being photographed, for all they grumble and pretend to be afflicted when either process is levied against them. In discussing this matter with Miss Liston I felt myself on delicate ground, for it was notorious that I figured in her first book in the guise of a misogynistic genius; the fact that she lengthened (and thickened) my hair, converted it from an indeterminate brown to a dusky black, gave me a drooping mustache, and invested my very

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Ordinary work-a-day eyes with a strange, magnetic attraction, availed nothing; I was at once recognized, and, I may remark in passing, an uncommonly disagreeable fellow she made me. Thus I had passed through the fire. I felt tolerably sure that she presented no other aspect of interest, real or supposed, and I was quite content that Miss Liston should serve all the rest of her acquaintance as she had served me. I reckoned they would last here at the present rate of production, about five years.

Fate was kind to Miss Liston, and provided her with most suitable patterns for her next piece of work at Polton's itself. There were a young man and a young woman staying in the house—Sir Gilbert Chillington and Miss Pamela Mylton. The moment Miss Liston was apprised of the possible romance, she began the study of the protagonists. She was looking out, she told me, for some new types (if it were any consolation—and there is a sort of dignity about it to be called a type, Miss Liston's victims were always welcome to so much), and she had found them in Chillington and Pamela. The former appeared to my dull eye to offer no salient novelty; he was tall, broad, handsome, and he possessed a manner of enviable placidity.

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Pamela, I allowed, was exactly the heroine Miss Liston loved — haughty, capricious, *difficile*, but sound and true at heart (I was mentally skimming Volume I.). Miss Liston agreed with me in my conception of Pamela, but declared that I did not do justice to the artistic possibilities latent in Chillington; he had a curious attraction which it would tax her skill (so she gravely informed me) to the utmost to reproduce. She proposed that I also should make a study of him, and attributed my hurried refusal to a shrinking from the difficulties of the task.

“Of course,” she observed, looking at our young friends who were talking nonsense at the other side of the lawn, “they must have a misunderstanding.”

“Why, of course,” said I, lighting my pipe. “What should you say to another man?”

“Or another woman?” said Miss Liston.

“It comes to the same thing,” said I. (About a volume and a half I meant.)

“But it’s more interesting. Do you think she’d better be a married woman?” And Miss Liston looked at me inquiringly.

“The age prefers them married,” I remarked.

This conversation happened on the second day

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of Miss Liston's visit, and she lost no time in beginning to study her subjects. Pamela, she said, she found pretty plain sailing, but Chillington continued to puzzle her. Again she could not make up her mind whether to have a happy or a tragic ending. In the interests of a tender-hearted public, I pleaded for marriage-bells.

"Yes, I think so," said Miss Liston, but she sighed, and I think she had an idea or two for a heart-broken separation, followed by mutual, life-long, hopeless devotion.

The complexity of young Sir Gilbert did not, in Miss Liston's opinion, appear less on further acquaintance; and indeed, I must admit that she was not altogether wrong in considering him worthy of attention. As I came to know him better, I discerned in him a smothered self-appreciation, which came to light in response to the least tribute of interest or admiration, but was yet far remote from the aggressiveness of a commonplace vanity. In a moment of indiscretion I had chaffed him — he was very good-natured — on the risks he ran at Miss Liston's hands; he was not disgusted, but neither did he plume himself or spread his feathers. He received the suggestions without surprise, and without any attempt at disclaiming fitness for the

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purpose ; but he received it as a matter which entailed a responsibility on him. I detected the conviction that, if the portrait was to be painted, it was due to the world that it should be well painted ; the subject must give the artist full opportunities.

“ What does she know about me ? ” he asked, in meditative tones.

“ She ’s very quick ; she ’ll soon pick up as much as she wants,” I assured him.

“ She ’ll probably go all wrong,” he said, sombrely ; and of course I could not tell him that it was of no consequence if she did. He would not have believed me, and would have done precisely what he proceeded to do, and that was to afford Miss Liston every chance of appraising his character and plumbing the depths of his soul. I may say at once that I did not regret this course of action ; for the effect of it was to allow me a chance of talking to Pamela Myles, and Pamela was exactly the sort of a girl to beguile the long, pleasant morning hours of a holiday in the country. No one had told Pamela that she was going to be put in a book, and I don’t think it would have made any difference had she been told. Pamela’s attitude towards books was one of

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healthy scorn, confidently based on admitted ignorance. So we never spoke of them, and my cousin Dora consoled with me more than once on the way in which Miss Liston, false to the implied terms of her invitation, deserted me in favor of Sir Gilbert, and left me to the mercies of a frivolous girl. Pamela appeared to be as little aggrieved as I was. I imagined that she supposed that Chillington would ask her to marry him some day before very long, and I was sure she would accept him; but it was quite plain that, if Miss Liston persisted in making Pamela her heroine, she would have to supply from her own resources a large supplement of passion. Pamela was far too deficient in the commodity to be made anything of, without such reinforcement, even by an art more adept at making much out of nothing than Miss Liston's straightforward method could claim to be.

A week passed, and then, one Friday morning, a new light burst on me. Miss Liston came into the garden at eleven o'clock and sat down by me on the lawn. Chillington and Pamela had gone riding with the squire; Dora was visiting the poor. We were alone. The appearance of Miss Liston at this hour (usually sacred to the use of

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the pen), no less than her puzzled look, told me that an obstruction had occurred in the novel. Presently she let me know what it was.

"I'm thinking of altering the scheme of my story, Mr. Wynne," said she. "Have you ever noticed how sometimes a man thinks he's in love when he is n't really?"

"Such a case sometimes occurs," I acknowledged.

"Yes, and he does n't find out his mistake —"

"Till they're married?"

"Sometimes, yes," she said, rather as though she were making an unwilling admission. "But sometimes he sees it before — when he meets somebody else."

"Very true," said I, with a grave nod.

"The false can't stand against the real," pursued Miss Liston; and then she fell into meditative silence. I stole a glance at her face; she was smiling. Was it in the pleasure of literary creation, an artistic ecstasy? I should have liked to answer yes, but I doubted it very much. Without pretending to Miss Liston's powers, I have the little subtlety that is needful to show me that more than one kind of smile may be seen on the human face, and that there is one very different from others;

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and finally, that that one is not evoked, as a rule, merely by the evolution of the troublesome encumbrance in pretty writing, vulgarly called a "plot."

"If," pursued Miss Liston, "some one comes who can appreciate him and draw out what is best in him —"

"That's all very well," said I, "but what of the first girl?"

"Oh, she's — she can be made shallow, you know; and I can put in a man for her. People need n't be much interested in her."

"Yes, you could manage it that way," said I, thinking how Pamela — I took the liberty of using her name for the shallow girl — would like such treatment.

"She will really be valuable mainly as a foil," observed Miss Liston; and she added generously, "I shall make her nice, you know, but shallow — not worthy of him."

"And what are you going to make the other girl like?" I asked.

Miss Liston started slightly; also she colored very slightly, and she answered, looking away from me across the lawn:

"I have n't quite made up my mind yet, Mr. Wynne."

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With the suspicion which this conversation aroused fresh in my mind, it was curious to hear Pamela laugh, as she said to me on the afternoon of the same day :

“Are n’t Sir Gilbert and Audrey Liston funny ? I tell you what, Mr. Wynne, I believe they’re writing a novel together.”

“Perhaps Chillington’s giving her the materials for one,” I suggested.

“I should n’t think,” observed Pamela, in her dispassionate way, “that anything very interesting had ever happened to him.”

“I thought you liked him,” I remarked, humbly.

“So I do. What’s that got to do with it ?” asked Pamela.

It was beyond question that Chillington enjoyed Miss Liston’s society ; the interest she showed in him was incense to his nostrils. I used to overhear fragments of his ideas about himself, which he was revealing in answer to her tactful inquiries. But neither was it doubtful that he had by no means lost his relish for Pamela’s lighter talk ; in fact, he seemed to turn to her with some relief — perhaps it is refreshing to escape from self-analysis, even when the process is conducted in the pleasantest possible manner — and the hours which Miss

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Liston gave to work were devoted by Chillington to maintaining his cordial relations with the lady whose comfortable and not over-tragical disposal was taxing Miss Liston's skill. For she had definitely decided all her plot ; she told me so a few days later. It was all planned out ; nay, the scene in which the truth as to his own feelings bursts on Sir Gilbert (I forget at the moment what name the novel gave him) was, I understood, actually written ; the shallow girl was to experience nothing worse than a wound to her vanity, and was to turn with as much alacrity as decency allowed to the substitute whom Miss Liston had now provided. All this was poured into my sympathetic ear, and I say sympathetic with all sincerity ; for, although I may occasionally treat Miss Liston's literary efforts with less than proper respect, she herself was my friend, and the conviction under which she was now living would, I knew, unless it were justified, bring her into much of that unhappiness in which one generally found her heroine plunged about the end of Volume II. The heroine generally got out all right, and the knowledge that she would enabled the reader to preserve cheerfulness. But would poor little Miss Liston get out ? I was none too sure of it.

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Suddenly a change came in the state of affairs. Pamela produced it. It must have struck her that the increasing intimacy of Miss Liston and Chillington might become something other than "funny." To put it briefly and metaphorically, she whistled her dog back to her heels. I am not skilled in understanding or describing the artifices of ladies ; but even I saw the transformation in Pamela. She put forth her strength and put on her prettiest gowns ; she refused to take her place in the see-saw of society, which Chillington had recently established for his pleasure. If he spent an hour with Miss Liston, Pamela would have nothing of him for a day ; she met his attentions with scorn unless they were undivided. Chillington seemed at first puzzled ; I believe that he never regarded his talks with Miss Liston in other than a business point of view, but directly he understood that Pamela claimed him, and that she was prepared, in case he did not obey her call, to establish a grievance against him, he lost no time in manifesting his obedience. A whole day passed in which, to my certain knowledge, he was not alone a moment with Miss Liston and did not, save at the family meals, exchange a word with her. As he walked

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off with Pamela, Miss Liston's eyes followed him in wistful longing; she stole away upstairs and did not come down till five o'clock. Then finding me strolling about with a cigarette, she joined me.

"Well, how goes the book?" I asked.

"I have n't done much to it just lately," she answered, in a low voice. "I—it's—I don't quite know what to do with it."

"I thought you'd settled?"

"So I had, but—oh, don't let's talk about it, Mr. Wynne!"

But a moment later she went on talking about it.

"I don't know why I should make it end happily," she said. "I'm sure life is n't always happy, is it?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "You mean your man might stick to the shallow girl after all?"

"Yes," I just heard her whisper.

"And be miserable afterwards?" I pursued.

"I don't know," said Miss Liston. "Perhaps he would n't."

"Then you must make him shallow himself."

"I can't do that," she said quickly. "Oh, how difficult it is!"

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She may have meant merely the art of writing — when I cordially agreed with her — but I think she meant also the way of the world, which does not make me withdraw my assent. I left her walking up and down in front of the drawing-room windows, a rather forlorn little figure, thrown into distinctness by the cold rays of the setting sun.

All was not over yet. That evening Chillington broke away. Led by vanity, or interest, or friendliness, I know not which — tired maybe of paying court (the attitude in which Pamela kept him), and thinking it would be pleasant to play the other part for a while — after dinner he went straight to Miss Liston, talked to her while we had coffee on the terrace, and then walked about with her. Pamela sat by me; she was very silent; she did not appear to be angry; but her handsome mouth wore a resolute expression. Chillington and Miss Liston wandered on into the shrubbery, and did not come into sight again for nearly half an hour.

“I think it’s cold,” said Pamela, in her cool, quiet tones. “And it’s also, Mr. Wynne, rather slow. I shall go to bed.”

I thought it a little impertinent of Pamela to attribute the “slowness” (which had undoubt-

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edly existed) to me, so I took my revenge by saying, with an assumption of innocence purposely and obviously unreal:

"Oh, but won't you wait and bid Miss Liston and Chillington good-night?"

Pamela looked at me for a moment. I made bold to smile.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Wynne," said she.

"No?" said I.

"No," said Pamela, and she turned away. But before she went she looked over her shoulder, and, still smiling, said, "Wish Miss Liston good-night for me, Mr. Wynne. Anything I have to say to Sir Gilbert will wait very well till to-morrow."

She had hardly gone in when the wanderers came out of the shrubbery and rejoined me. Chillington wore his usual passive look, but Miss Liston's face was happy and radiant. Chillington passed on into the drawing-room. Miss Liston lingered a moment by me.

"Why, you look," said I, "as if you'd invented the finest scene ever written."

She did not answer me directly, but stood looking up at the stars. Then she said in a dreamy tone:

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"I think I shall stick to my old idea in the book."

As she spoke Chillington came out. Even in the dim light I saw a frown on his face.

"I say, Wynne," said he, "where's Miss Myles?"

"She's gone to bed," I answered. "She told me to wish you good-night for her, Miss Liston. No message for you, Chillington."

Miss Liston's eyes were on him. He took no notice of her; he stood frowning for an instant, then, with some muttered ejaculation, he strode back into the house. We heard his heavy tread across the drawing-room; we heard the door slammed behind him, and I found myself looking on Miss Liston's altered face.

"What does he want her for, I wonder?" she said, in an agitation that made my presence, my thoughts, my suspicions, nothing to her. "He said nothing to me about wanting to speak to her to-night." And she walked slowly into the house, her eyes on the ground, and the light gone from her face and the joy dead in it. Whereupon I, left alone, began to rail at the gods that a dear, silly little soul like Miss Liston should bother her poor, silly little head about

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a hulking fool; in which reflections I did, of course, immense injustice not only to an eminent author, but also to a perfectly honorable, though somewhat dense and decidedly conceited, gentleman.

The next morning Sir Gilbert Chillington ate dirt — there is no other way of expressing it — in great quantities and with infinite humility. My admirable friend Miss Pamela was severe. I saw him walk six yards behind her for the length of the terrace; not a look or a turn of her head gave him leave to join her. Miss Liston had gone upstairs, and I watched the scene from the window of the smoking-room. At last, at the end of the long walk, just where the laurel-bushes mark the beginning of the shrubberies — on the threshold of the scene of his crime — Pamela turned round suddenly and faced the repentant sinner. The most interesting things in life are those which, perhaps by the inevitable nature of the case, one does not hear; and I did not hear the scene which followed. For a while they stood talking — rather, he talked and she listened. Then she turned again and walked slowly into the shrubbery. Chillington followed. It was the end of a chapter, and I had laid down the book.

How and from whom Miss Liston heard the

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news, which Chillington himself told me with a glimmer of shame or a touch of embarrassment some two hours later, I do not know ; but hear it she did before luncheon, for she came down, ready armed with the neatest little speeches for both the happy lovers. I did not expect Pamela to show an ounce more of feeling than the strictest canons of propriety demanded, and she fulfilled my expectations to the letter ; but I had hoped, I confess, that Chillington would have displayed some little consciousness. He did not ; and it is my belief that, throughout the events which I have recorded, he retained, and that he still retains, the conviction that Miss Liston's interest in him was purely literary and artistic, and that she devoted herself to his society simply because he offered an interesting problem and an inspiring theme. An ingenious charity may find in that attitude evidence of modesty ; to my thinking it argues a more subtle and magnificent conceit than if he had fathomed the truth, as many humbler men in his place would have done.

On the day after the engagement was accomplished Miss Liston left us to return to London. She came out in her hat and jacket and sat down by me ; the carriage was to be round in ten minutes.

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She put on her gloves slowly and buttoned them carefully. This done, she said :

“ By the way, Mr. Wynne, I have adopted your suggestion. The man does n’t find out.”

“ Then you ’ve made him a fool ? ” I asked bluntly.

“ No,” she answered. “ I — I think it might happen though he was n’t a fool.”

She sat with her hands in her lap for a moment or two, then she went on in a lower voice :

“ I ’m going to make him find out afterwards.”

I felt her glance on me, but I looked straight in front of me.

“ What ! after he ’s married the shallow girl ? ”

“ Yes,” said Miss Liston.

“ Rather too late, is n’t it ? At least, if you mean there is to be a happy ending.”

Miss Liston enlaced her fingers.

“ I have n’t decided about the ending yet,” she said.

“ If your intent is to be tragical — which is the fashion — you ’ll do as you stand,” said I.

“ Yes,” she answered slowly, “ if I ’m tragical, I shall do as I stand.”

There was another pause, and rather a long one ;

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the wheels of the carriage were audible on the gravel of the front drive.

Miss Liston stood up. I rose and held out my hand.

"Of course," said Miss Liston, still intent on her novel, "I could—" She stopped again, and looked apprehensively at me. My face, I believe, expressed nothing more than polite attention and friendly interest.

"Of course," she began again, "the shallow girl — his wife — might — might die, Mr. Wynne."

"In novels," said I, with a smile, "while there's death there's hope."

"Yes, in novels," she answered, giving me her hand.

The poor little woman was very unhappy. Unwisely, I dare say, I pressed her hand. It was enough; the tears leapt to her eyes; she gave my great fist a hurried squeeze. I have seldom been more touched by any thanks, however warm or eloquent, and hurried away.

I have read the novel. It came out a little while ago. The man finds out after the marriage; the shallow girl dies unregretted (she turns out as badly as possible); the real love comes, and all ends joyfully. It is a simple story, prettily told in

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its little way, and the scene of the reunion is written with genuine feeling — nay, with a touch of real passion. But then Sir Gilbert Chillington never meets Miss Liston now. And Lady Chillington not only behaves with her customary propriety, but is in the enjoyment of most excellent health and spirits.

True art demands an adaptation, not a copy, of life. I saw that remark somewhere the other day. It seems correct, if Miss Liston be any authority.

Love's Conundrum



IT was a charmingly mild and balmy day. The sun shone beyond the orchard, and the shade was cool inside. A light breeze stirred the boughs of the old apple tree under which the philosopher sat. None of these things did the philosopher notice, unless it might be when the wind blew about the leaves of the large volume on his knees, and he had to find his place again. Then he would exclaim against the wind, shuffle the leaves till he got the right page, and settle to his reading. The book was a treatise on ontology; it was written by another philosopher, a friend of this philosopher's; it bristled with fallacies, and this philosopher was discovering them all, and noting them on the fly-leaf at the end. He was not going to review the book (as some might have thought from his behavior), or even to answer it in a work of his own. It was just that he found a pleasure

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in stripping any poor fallacy naked and crucifying it.

Presently a girl in a white frock came into the orchard. She picked up an apple, bit it, and found it ripe. Holding it in her hand she walked up to where the philosopher sat, and looked at him. He did not stir. She took a bite out of the apple, munched it, and swallowed it. The philosopher crucified a fallacy on the fly-leaf. The girl flung the apple away.

"Mr. Jerningham," said she, "are you very busy?"

The philosopher, pencil in hand, looked up.

"No, Miss May," said he, "not very."

"Because I want your opinion."

"In one moment," said the philosopher apologetically.

He turned back to the fly-leaf and began to nail the last fallacy a little tighter to the cross. The girl regarded him first with amused impatience, then with a vexed frown, finally with a wistful regret. He was so very old for his age, she thought; he could not be much beyond thirty; his hair was thick and full of waves, his eyes bright and clear, his complexion not yet divested of all youth's relics.

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"Now, Miss May, I'm at your service," said the philosopher with a lingering look at his impaled fallacy. And he closed the book, keeping it, however, on his knee.

The girl sat down just opposite to him. "It's a very important thing I want to ask you," she began, tugging at a tuft of grass, "and it's very — difficult, and you must n't tell any one I asked you; at least, I'd rather you did n't."

"I shall not speak of it; indeed, I shall probably not remember it," said the philosopher.

"And you must n't look at me, please, while I'm asking you."

"I don't think I was looking at you, but if I was I beg your pardon," said the philosopher apologetically.

She pulled the tuft of grass right out of the ground and flung it from her with all her force.

"Suppose a man —" she began. "No, that's not right."

"You can take any hypothesis you please," observed the philosopher, "but you must verify it afterwards, of course."

"Oh, do let us go on. Suppose a girl, Mr. Jerningham — I wish you would n't nod."

"It was only to show that I followed you."

Love's Conundrum

"Oh, of course you 'follow me,' as you call it. Suppose a girl had two lovers—you're nodding again!—or, I ought to say, suppose there were two men who might be in love with a girl"

"Only two?" asked the philosopher. "You see any number of men *might* be in love with —"

"Oh, we can leave the rest out," said Miss May with a sudden dimple; "they don't matter."

"Very well," said the philosopher. "If they are irrelevant we will put them aside."

"Suppose then that one of these men was, oh, *awfully* in love with the girl, and—and proposed, you know —"

"A moment!" said the philosopher, opening a note-book. "Let me take down his proposition. What was it?"

"Why, proposed to her—asked her to marry him," said the girl, with a stare.

"Dear me! How stupid of me! I forgot that special use of the word. Yes?"

"The girl likes him pretty well, and her people approve of him and all that, you know."

"That simplifies the problem," said the philosopher, nodding again.

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"But she's not in—in love with him, you know. She does n't *really* care for him—*much*. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. It is a most natural state of mind."

"Well then, suppose that there's another man—what are you writing?"

"I only put down (B)—like that," pleaded the philosopher, meekly exhibiting his note-book.

She looked at him in a sort of helpless exasperation, with just a smile somewhere in the background of it.

"Oh, you really are—" she exclaimed. "But let me go on. The other man is a friend of the girl's; he's very clever—oh, fearfully clever; and he's rather handsome. You need n't put that down."

"It is certainly not very material," admitted the philosopher and he crossed out "handsome."

"Clever" he left.

"And the girl is most awfully—she admires him tremendously; she thinks him just the greatest man that ever lived, you know. And she—she—" The girl paused.

"I'm following," said the philosopher, with pencil poised.

Love's Conundrum

"She'd think it better than the whole world if — if she could be anything to him, you know."

"You mean become his wife?"

"Well, of course I do — at least I suppose I do."

"You spoke rather vaguely, you know."

The girl cast one glance at the philosopher as she replied —

"Well, yes. I did mean become his wife."

"Yes. Well?"

"But," continued the girl, starting on another tuft of grass, "he does n't think much about those things. He likes her. I think he likes her —"

"Well, does n't dislike her?" suggested the philosopher. "Shall we call him indifferent?"

"I don't know. Yes, rather indifferent. I don't think he thinks about it, you know. But she — she's pretty. You need n't put that down."

"I was about to do so," observed the philosopher.

"She thinks life with him would be just heaven; and — and she thinks she would make him awfully happy. She would — would be so proud of him, you see."

"I see. Yes!"

Loye's Conundrum

"And — I don't know how to put it, quite — she thinks that if he ever thought about it at all, he might care for her; because he does n't care for anybody else; and she's pretty —"

"You said that before."

"Oh, dear, I dare say I did. And most men care for somebody, don't they? some girl, I mean."

"Most men, no doubt," conceded the philosopher.

"Well, then, what ought she to do? It's not a real thing, you know, Mr. Jerningham. It's in — in a novel I was reading." She said this hastily, and blushed as she spoke.

"Dear me! And it's quite an interesting case! Yes, I see. The question is, Will she act most wisely in accepting the offer of the man who loves her exceedingly, but for whom she entertains only a moderate affection."

"Yes. Just a liking. He's just a friend."

"Exactly. Or in marrying the other man whom she loves ex —"

"That's not it. How can she marry him? He has n't — he has n't asked her, you see."

"True. I forgot. Let us assume, though, for the moment, that he has asked her. She would then have to consider which marriage

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would probably be productive of the greater sum total of—”

“Oh, but you need n’t consider that.”

“But it seems the best logical order. We can afterwards make allowance for the element of uncertainty caused by —”

“Oh no. I don’t want it like that. I know perfectly well which she’d do if he—the other man, you know—asked her.”

“You apprehend that —”

“Never mind what I ‘apprehend.’ Take it just as I told you.”

“Very good. A has asked her hand, B has not.”

“Yes.”

“May I take it that, but for the disturbing influence of B, A would be a satisfactory — er — candidate ?”

“Ye-es. I think so.”

“She therefore enjoys a certainty of considerable happiness if she marries A.”

“Ye-es. Not perfect, because of — B, you know.”

“Quite so, quite so ; but still a fair amount of happiness. Is it not so ?”

“I don’t — well, perhaps.”

Love's Conundrum

"On the other hand, if B did ask her, we are to postulate a higher degree of happiness for her?"

"Yes, please, Mr. Jerningham — much higher."

"For both of them?"

"For her. Never mind him."

"Very well. That again simplifies the problem. But his asking her is a contingency only?"

"Yes, that's all."

The philosopher spread out his hands.

"My dear young lady," he said, "it becomes a question of degree. How probable or improbable is it?"

"I don't know. Not very probable — unless — unless —"

"Well?"

"Unless he did happen to notice, you know."

"Ah, yes. We supposed that, if he thought of it, he would probably take the desired step — at least, that he might be led to do so. Could she not — er — indicate her preference?"

"She might try — no, she could n't do much. You see, he — he does n't think about such things."

"I understand precisely. And it seems to me, Miss May, that in that very fact we find our solution."

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"Do we?" she asked.

"I think so. He has evidently no natural inclination towards her—perhaps not towards marriage at all. Any feeling aroused in him would be necessarily shallow and in a measure artificial—and in all likelihood purely temporary. Moreover, if she took steps to arouse his attention, one of two things would be likely to happen. Are you following me?"

"Yes, Mr. Jerningham."

"Either he would be repelled by her overtures—which you must admit is not improbable—and then the position would be unpleasant, and even degrading, for her. Or, on the other hand, he might, through a misplaced feeling of gallantry—"

"Through what?"

"Through a mistaken idea of politeness or a mistaken view of what was kind, allow himself to be drawn into a connection for which he has no genuine liking. You agree with me that one or other of these things would be likely?"

"Yes, I suppose they would, unless he did come to care for her."

"Ah, you return to that hypothesis. I think

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it's an extremely fanciful one. No. She need n't marry A, but she must let B alone."

The philosopher closed his book, took off his glasses, wiped them, replaced them, and leaned back against the trunk of the apple tree. The girl picked a dandelion in pieces. After a long pause she asked :

"You think B's feelings would n't be at all likely to — to change?"

"That depends on the sort of man he is. But if he is an able man, with intellectual interests which engross him — a man to whom women's society is not a necessity —"

"He's just like that," said the girl, and she bit the head off a daisy.

"Then," said the philosopher, "I see not the least reason for supposing that his feelings will change."

"And would you advise her to marry the other — A?"

"Well, on the whole, I should. A is a good fellow (I think we made A a good fellow): he is a suitable match, his love for her is true and genuine —"

"It's tremendous!"

"Yes, and — er — extreme. She likes him. There is every reason to hope that her liking

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will develop into a sufficiently deep and stable affection. She will get rid of her folly about B and make A a good wife. Yes, Miss May, if I were the author of your novel, I should make her marry A, and I should call that a happy ending."

A silence followed. It was broken by the philosopher.

"Is that all you wanted my opinion about, Miss May?" he asked, with his finger between the leaves of the treatise on ontology.

"Yes, I think so. I hope I have n't bored you?"

"I've enjoyed the discussion extremely. I had no idea that novels raised points of such psychological interest. I must find time to read one."

The girl shifted her position till, instead of her full face, her profile was turned towards him. looking away towards the paddock that lay brilliant in sunshine on the skirts of the apple orchard, she asked in low, slow tones, twisting her hands in her lap:

"Don't you think that perhaps if B found out afterwards—when she had married A, you know—that she had cared for him so very, very much, he might be a little sorry?"

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"If he were a gentleman, he would regret it deeply."

"I mean — sorry on his own account; that — that he had thrown away all that, you know?"

The philosopher looked meditative.

"I think," he pronounced, "that it is very probable he would. I can well imagine it."

"He might never find anybody to love him like that again," she said, gazing on the gleaming paddock.

"He probably would not," agreed the philosopher.

"And — and most people like being loved, don't they?"

"To crave for love is an almost universal instinct, Miss May."

"Yes, almost," she said, with a dreary little smile. "You see, he'll get old and — and have no one to look after him."

"He will."

"And no home."

"Well, in a sense, none," corrected the philosopher, smiling. "But really you'll frighten me. I'm a bachelor myself, you know, Miss May."

"Yes," she whispered just audibly.

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"And all your terrors are before me."

"Well, unless —"

"Oh, we need n't have that 'unless,'" laughed the philosopher, cheerfully. "There's no 'unless' about it, Miss May."

The girl jumped to her feet; for an instant she looked at the philosopher. She opened her lips as if to speak, and, at the thought of what lay at her tongue's tip, her face grew red. But the philosopher was gazing past her, and his eyes rested in calm contemplation on the gleaming paddock.

"A beautiful thing, sunshine, to be sure," said he.

Her blush faded away into paleness; her lips closed. Without speaking she turned and walked slowly away, her head drooping. The philosopher heard the rustling of her skirt in the long grass of the orchard; he watched her for a few moments.

"A pretty, graceful creature," said he with a smile.

Then he opened his book, took his pencil in his hand, and slipped in a careful forefinger to mark the fly-leaf.

The sun had passed mid-heaven, and began to decline westwards before he finished the book. Then he stretched himself and looked at his watch.

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"Good gracious, two o'clock! I shall be late for lunch!" and he hurried to his feet.

He was very late for lunch.

"Everything's cold," wailed his hostess. "Where have you been, Mr. Jerningham?"

"Only in the orchard — reading."

"And you've missed May!"

"Missed Miss May? How do you mean? I had a long talk with her this morning — a most interesting talk."

"But you were n't here to say good-by. Now, you don't mean to say that you forgot that she was leaving by the two o'clock train? What a man you are!"

"Dear me! To think of my forgetting it!" said the philosopher, shamefacedly.

"She told me to say good-by to you for her."

"She's very kind. I can't forgive myself."

His hostess looked at him for a moment; then she sighed, and smiled, and sighed again.

"Have you everything you want?" she asked.

"Everything, thank you," said he, sitting down opposite the cheese, and propping his book (he thought he would just run through the last chapter again) against the loaf; "everything in the world that I want, thanks."

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His hostess did not tell him that the girl had come in from the apple orchard, and run hastily upstairs, lest her friend should see what her friend did see in her eyes. So that he had no suspicion at all that he had received an offer of marriage and refused it. And he did not refer to anything of that sort when he paused once in his reading and exclaimed :

“ I ’m really sorry I missed Miss May. That was an interesting case of hers. But I gave the right answer. The girl ought to marry A.

And so the girl did.

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IT is a most anxious thing to be an absolute ruler," said Duke Deodonato, "but I have made up my mind. The doctor has convinced me (here Dr. Fusbius, Ph.D., bowed very low) that marriage is the best, noblest, wholesomest, and happiest of human conditions."

"Your Highness will remember —" began the President of the Council.

"My lord, I have made up my mind," said Duke Deodonato.

Thus speaking, the Duke took a large sheet of foolscap paper, and wrote rapidly for a minute or two.

"There," he said, pushing the paper over to the President, "is the decree."

"The decree, sir?"

"I think three weeks afford ample space," said Duke Deodonato.

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"Three weeks, sir?"

"For every man over twenty-one years of age in this Duchy to find himself a wife."

"Your Highness," observed Dr. Fusbius with deference, "will consider that between an abstract proposition and a practical measure —"

"There is to the logical mind no stopping-place," interrupted Duke Deodonato.

"But, sir," cried the President, "imagine the consternation which this —!"

"Let it be gazetted to-night," said Duke Deodonato.

"I would venture," said the President, "to remind your Highness that you are yourself a bachelor."

"Laws," said Duke Deodonato, "do not bind the Crown unless the Crown is expressly mentioned."

"True, sir; but I humbly conceive that it would be *pessimi exempli* —"

"You are right; I will marry myself," said Duke Deodonato.

"But, sir, three weeks! The hand of a princess cannot be requested and granted in —"

"Then find me somebody else," said Deodonato; "and pray leave me. I would be alone;"

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and Duke Deodonato waved his hand to the door.

Outside the door the President said to the Doctor :

"I could wish, sir, that you had not convinced his Highness."

"My lord," rejoined the Doctor, "truth is my only preoccupation."

"Sir," said the President, "you are married?"

"My lord," answered the Doctor, "I am not."

"I thought not," said the President, as he folded up the decree, and put it in his pocket.

It is useless to deny that Duke Deodonato's decree caused considerable disturbance in the Duchy. In the first place, the Crown lawyers raised a puzzle of law. Did the word "man" as used in the decree, include "woman?" The President shook his head, and referred the question to his Highness.

"It seems immaterial," observed the Duke. "If a man marries, a woman marries."

"*Ex vi terminorum*," assented the Doctor.

"But, sir," said the President, "there are more women than men in the Duchy."

Duke Deodonato threw down his pen. "This is very provoking," said he. "Why was it

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allowed? I'm sure it happened before *I* came to the throne."

The doctor was about to point out that it could hardly have been guarded against, when the President (who was a better courtier) anticipated him.

"We did not foresee that your Highness, in your Highness's wisdom, would issue this decree," he said humbly.

"True," said Duke Deodonato, who was a just man.

"Would your Highness vouchsafe any explanation—?"

"What are the Judges for?" asked Duke Deodonato. "There is the law—let them interpret it."

Whereupon the Judges held that a "man" was not a "woman," and that although every man must marry, no woman need.

"It will make no difference," said the President.

"None at all," said Dr. Fusbius.

Nor, perhaps, would it, seeing that women are ever kind, and in no way by nature averse from marriage, had it not become known that Duke Deodonato himself intended to choose a wife from the ladies of his own dominions, and to choose her (according to the advice of Dr. Fusbius, who,

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in truth, saw little whither his counsel would in the end carry the Duke) without regard to such adventitious matters as rank or wealth, and purely for her beauty, talent, and virtue. Which resolve being proclaimed, straightway all the ladies of the Duchy, of whatsoever station, calling, age, appearance, wit, or character, conceiving each of them that she, and no other, should become the Duchess, sturdily refused all offers of marriage (although they were many of them as desperately enamored as virtuous ladies may be), and did nought else than walk, drive, ride, and display their charms in the park before the windows of the ducal palace. And thus it fell out that when a week had gone by, no man had obeyed Duke Deodonato's decree, and they were, from sheer want of brides, like to fall into contempt of the law and under the high displeasure of the Duke.

Upon this the President and Dr. Fusbius sought audience of his Highness, and humbly laid before him the unforeseen obstacle which had occurred.

"Woman is ever ambitious," said Dr. Fusbius.

"Nay," corrected the President, "they have seen his Highness's person as his Highness has ridden through the city."

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Duke Deodonato threw down his pen.

"This is very tiresome," said he, knitting his brows. "My lord, I would be further advised on this matter. Return at the same hour to-morrow."

The next day, Duke Deodonato's forehead had regained its customary smoothness, and his manner was tranquil and assured.

"Our pleasure is," said he to the President, "that, albeit no woman shall be compelled to marry if so be that she be not invited thereunto; yet, if bidden, she shall in no wise refuse, but straightway espouse that man who first after the date of these presents shall solicit her hand."

The President bowed in admiration.

"It is, if I may humbly say so, a practical and wise solution, sir," he said.

"I apprehend that it will remedy the mischief," said Duke Deodonato, not ill-pleased.

And doubtless it would have had an effect as altogether satisfactory, excellent, beneficial, salutary, and universal as the wisdom of Duke Deodonato had anticipated from it, had it not fallen out that, on the promulgation of the decree, all the aforesaid ladies of the Duchy, of whatsoever station, calling, age, appearance, wit, or character,

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straightway, and so swiftly that no man had time wherein to pay his court to them, fled to and shut and bolted and barricaded themselves in houses, castles, cupboards, cellars, stables, lofts, churches, chapels, chests, and every other kind of receptacle whatsoever, and there remained beyond reach of any man, be he whom he would, lest haply one, coming, should ask their hand in marriage, and thus they should lose all prospect of wedding the Duke.

When Duke Deodonato was apprised of this lamentable action on the part of the ladies of the Duchy, he frowned and laid down his pen.

"This is very annoying," said he. "There appears to be a disposition to thwart our endeavors for the public good."

"It is gross contumacy," said Dr. Fusbius.

"Yet," remarked the President, "inspired by a natural, if ill-disciplined, admiration for his Highness's person."

"The decree is now a fortnight old," observed Duke Deodonato. "Leave me, I will consider further of this matter."

Now even as his Highness spoke, a mighty uproar arose under the palace windows, and Duke Deodonato, looking out of the window (which, be

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it remembered, but for the guidance of Heaven he might not have done), beheld a maiden of wonderful charms struggling in the clutches of two halberdiers of the guard, who were hauling her off to prison.

"Bring hither that damsel," said Deodonato.

Presently the damsel, still held by the soldiers, entered the room. Her robe was dishevelled and rent, her golden hair hung loose on her shoulders, and her eyes were full of tears.

"At whose suit is she arrested?" asked Deodonato.

"At the suit of the most learned Dr. Fusbius, may it please your Highness."

"Sir," said Dr. Fusbius, "it is true. This lady, grossly contemning your Highness's decree, has refused my hand in marriage."

"Is it true, damsel?" asked Duke Deodonato.

"Hear me, your Highness!" answered she. "I left my dwelling but an instant, for we were in sore straits for —"

"Bread?" asked Deodonato, a touch of sympathy in his voice.

"May it please your Highness, no — pins wherewith to fasten our hair. And, as I ran to the merchants, this aged man —"

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"I am but turned of fifty," interrupted Fusbius.

"And have not yet learnt silence?" asked Deodonato severely. "Damsel, proceed!"

"Caught me by my gown as I ran and —"

"I proposed marriage to her," said Fusbius.

"Nay, if you proposed marriage, she shall marry you," said Deodonato. "By the crown of my fathers, she shall marry you. But what said he, damsel?"

"May it please your Highness, he said that I had the prettiest face in all the Duchy, and that he would have no wife but me; and thereupon he kissed me; and I would have none of him, and I struck him and escaped."

"Send for the Judges," said Duke Deodonato. "And meanwhile keep this damsel and let no man propose marriage to her until Our pleasure be known."

Now when the Judges were come, and the maiden was brought in and set over against them on the right hand, and the learned Doctor took his stand on the left, Deodonato prayed the Judges that they would perpend carefully and anxiously of the question — using all lore, research, wisdom, discretion, and justice — whether Dr. Fusbius had proposed marriage unto the maiden or no.

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"Thus shall Our mind be informed, and we shall deal profitably with this matter," concluded Duke Deodonato.

Upon which arose great debate. For there was one part of the learned men which leant upon the letter and found no invitation to marriage in the words of Dr. Fusbius; while another part would have it that in all things the spirit and mind of the utterer must be regarded, and that it sorted not with the years, virtues, learning, and position of the said most learned Doctor that he had spoken such words and sealed the same with a kiss, save under the firm impression, thought, and conviction that he was offering his hand in marriage; which said impression, thought and conviction were fully and reasonably declared and evident in his actions, manner, bearing, air, and conduct.

"This is very perplexing," said Duke Deodonato, and he knit his brows; for as he gazed upon the beauty of the damsel, it seemed to him a thing unnatural, undesirable, unpalatable, unpleasant, and unendurable, that she should wed Dr. Fusbius. Yet if such were the law — Duke Deodonato sighed, and he glanced at the damsel: and it chanced that the damsel glanced at Duke Deodonato, and, seeing that he was a proper man

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and comely, and that his eye spoke his admiration of her, she blushed ; and her cheek that had gone white when those of the Judges who favored the learned Doctor were speaking, went red as a rose again, and she strove to order her hair and to conceal the rent that was in her robe. And Duke Deodonato sighed again.

“ My Lord,” he said to the President, “ we have heard these wise and erudite men ; and, forasmuch as the matter is difficult, they are divided among themselves, and the staff whereon we leant is broken. Speak, therefore, your mind.”

Then the President of the Council looked earnestly at Duke Deodonato, but the Duke veiled his face with his hand.

“ Answer truly,” said he, “ without fear or favor ; so shall you fulfil Our pleasure.”

And the President, looking round upon the company, said :

“ It is, Your Highness, by all reasonable, honest, just, proper, and honorable intendment, as good, sound, full, and explicit an offer of marriage as hath ever been had in this Duchy.”

“ So be it,” said Duke Deodonato ; and Dr. Fusbius smiled in triumph while the maiden grew pale again.

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"And," pursued the President, "it binds, controls, and rules every man, woman, and child in these Your Highness's dominions, and hath the force of law over all."

"So be it," said Deodonato again.

"Saving," added the President, "Your Highness only."

There was a movement among the company.

"For," pursued the President, "by the ancient laws, customs, manners, and observances of the Duchy, no decree or law shall in any way whatsoever impair, alter, lessen, or derogate from the high rights, powers, and prerogatives of Your Highness, whom may Heaven long preserve. Although, therefore, it be, by and pursuant to Your Highness's decree, the sure right of every man in this Duchy to be accepted in marriage of any damsel whom he shall invite thereunto, yet is this right in all respects subject to and controlled by the natural, legal, inalienable, unalterable, and sovereign prerogative of Your Highness to marry what damsel soever it shall be Your pleasure to bid share your throne. Hence I, in obedience to Your Highness's commands, pronounce and declare that this damsel is lawfully and irrevocably bound and affianced to the learned Dr. Fusbius,

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unless and until it shall please Your Highness yourself to demand her hand in marriage. May what I have spoken please Your Highness." And the President sat down.

Duke Deodonato sat awhile in thought, and there was silence in the hall. Then he spoke :

"Let all withdraw, saving the damsel only."

And they one and all withdrew, and Duke Deodonato was left alone with the damsel.

Then he arose and gazed long on the damsel ; but the damsel would not look on Duke Deodonato.

"How are you called, lady?" asked Duke Deodonato.

"I am called Dulcissima," said she.

"Well named!" said Deodonato softly, and he went to the damsel, and he laid his hand, full gently, on her robe, and he said :

"Dulcissima, you have the prettiest face in all the Duchy, and I shall have no wife but you;" and Duke Deodonato kissed the damsel.

The damsel forebore to strike Duke Deodonato, as she had struck Dr. Fusbius. Again her cheek went red, and again pale, and she said :

"I wed no man on compulsion."

"Madam, I am your Sovereign," said Duke Deodonato ; and his eyes were on the damsel.

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"If you were an Archangel —" cried the damsel.

"Our house is not wont to be scorned of ladies," said Deodonato. "Am I crooked, or baseborn, or a fool?"

"This day in your Duchy women are slaves, and men their masters by your will," said she.

"It is the order of nature," said Deodonato.

"It is not my pleasure," said the damsel.

Then Deodonato laid his hand on his silver bell, for he was very angry.

"Fusbius waits without," said he.

"I will wed him and kill him," cried Dulcissima.

Deodonato gazed on her.

"You have no chance of using the pins," said he, "and the rent in your gown is very sore."

And upon this the eyes of the damsel lost their fire and sought the floor; and she plucked at her girdle, and would not look on Deodonato. And they said outside:

"It is very still in the Hall of the Duke."

Then said Deodonato:

"Dulcissima, what would you?"

"That you repeal your decrees," said she.

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Deodonato's brow grew dark ; he did not love to go back.

"What I have decreed, I have decreed," said he.

"And what I have resolved, I have resolved," said she.

Deodonato drew near to her.

"And if I repeal the decrees ?" said he.

"You will do well," said she.

"And you will wed — ?"

"Whom I will," said she.

Deodonato turned to the window, and for a space he looked out ; and the damsel smoothed her hair and drew her robe, where it was whole, across the rent ; and she looked on Deodonato as he stood, and her bosom rose and fell. And she prayed a prayer that no man heard or, if he heard, might be so base as to tell. But she saw the dark locks of Deodonato's hair and his form, straight as an arrow and tall as a six-foot wand, in the window. And again, outside, they said :

"It is strangely still in the Hall of the Duke."

Then Deodonato turned, and he pressed with his hand on the silver bell, and straightway the Hall was filled with the Councillors, the Judges, and the halberdiers, attentive to hear the will of

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Deodonato and the fate of the damsel. And the small eyes of Fusbius glowed, and the calm eyes of the President smiled.

"My Cousins, Gentlemen, and my faithful Guard," said Deodonato, "time, which is Heaven's mighty instrument, brings counsel. Say! what the Duke has done, shall any man undo?"

Then cried they all, save one:

"No man!"

And the President said:

"Saving the Duke."

"The decrees which I make," said Deodonato, "I unmake. Henceforth let men and maidens in my Duchy marry or not marry as they will, and God give them joy of it."

And all, save Fusbius, cried "Amen." But Fusbius cried:

"Your Highness, it is demonstrated beyond cavil, ay, to the satisfaction of Your Highness —"

"This is very tedious," said Deodonato. "Let him speak no more."

And again he drew near to Dulcissima, and there, before them all, he fell on his knee. And a murmur ran through the hall.

"Madam," said Deodonato, "if you love me,

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wed me. And if you love me not, depart in peace and in honor; and I, Deodonato, will live my life alone."

Then the damsel trembled, and barely did Deodonato catch her words:

"There are many men here," said she.

"It is not given to Princes," said Deodonato, "to be alone. Nevertheless, if you will, leave me alone."

And the damsel bent low, so that the breath of her mouth stirred the hair on Deodonato's head, and he shivered as he knelt.

"My Prince and my King!" said she.

And Deodonato shot to his feet, and before them all he kissed her, and, turning, spoke:

"As I have wooed, let every man in this Duchy woo. As I have won, let every man that is worthy win. For, unless he so woo, and unless he so win, vain is his wooing and vain is his winning, and a fig for his wedding, say I, Deodonato, I that was Deodonato, and now am—Deodonato and Dulcissima."

And a great cheer rang out in the Hall, and Fusbius fled to the door; and they tore his gown as he went and cursed him for a knave. But the President raised his voice aloud and cried:

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“ May Heaven preserve your Highnesses — and here’s a blessing on all windows ! ”

And that is the reason why you will find (if you travel there, as I trust you may, for nowhere are the ladies fairer or the men so gallant) more windows in the Duchy of Deodonato than anywhere in the wide world besides. For the more windows, the wider the view ; and the wider the view, the more pretty damsels you see, the more jocund a thing is life — and that is what the men of the Duchy love — and not least Duke Deodonato, whom, with his bride Dulcissima, may Heaven long preserve !

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